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CHAMPION SAM; or, The Monarchs of the Show.

A ROMANCE OF THE CIRCUS AND PRIZE-RINGS.

BY COL. THOMAS HOYER MONSTERY,
CHAMPION-AT-ARMS OF THE TWO AMERICAS.

AUTHOR OF "IRON WRIST, THE SWORDMASTER," "THE DEMON DUELIST," "THE CZAR SPY," "MOURAD, THE MANELUKE," ETC., ETC.



THE TWO MEN KEPT AT IT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RING LIKE TIGERS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BROKEN WIRE.

TWENTY years ago, in the midst of the Civil War, New York was a hot bed of vicious luxury, and "concert saloons," so-called, were to be found in the best parts of Broadway.

Crowded with patrons who made and spent money lavishly, they resounded every night with the sounds of revelry. Beautiful, but shameless girls, tawdrily dressed, waited on riotous young men who were bedecked with "loud" jewelry and smoked twenty-five cent cigars while ordering champagne at five dollars a bottle.

The most famous of these establishments was "The Waterbury," where our story opens, sadly enough, but truly enough, with the death of a servant of the public. His name, on the bills, was "Signor Carlo, the Unequalled, Wire Walker to the Czar and all the crowned heads of Europe." Behind the scenes he was known as Charley Chase, a good-natured, dissipated fellow, fond of wine and women, and the best acrobat in the city. He had been walking a tight wire about forty feet from the stage, when it snapped without warning, as he was tossing a pair of cannon balls from hand to hand in the air, and so terrible was the sight of his fall, that even the hardened crowd in the Waterbury sickened, girls fainted in dead earnest, and strong men turned pale and ran out of the saloon to avoid seeing more.

The curtain was rung down hastily, and then—not before—out of the wings ran a pale, haggard boy, hardly more than eight years old, dressed in silk fleshings, with a pair of little white wings on his shoulders and a tiny gilt bow and quiver. His fair hair had a wreath of artificial roses in the midst of the curls, and it was evident he had been dressed for Cupid, and was waiting for his turn to come when the accident occurred. He had seen Carlo fall; but, so strong was the instinct of training on him, that he had not dared to run out from the wings till the curtain was down.

And the fallen man was his father!

There he lay on the stage. A moment before a magnificently handsome man, with the face and figure of an Apollo; now—

The boy bent over the crushed and mutilated body in silence, pale as a corpse, feeling it here and there with his little hands, a wild look in his brown eyes, murmuring:

"Oh, father, father!"

It was all he could say, and he kept on repeating it, as if unconscious of everything else, while the performers gathered slowly around the group, pale and scared, not knowing what to say or do in the sudden calamity.

There was something so pathetic in the beauty of the child and his dress, in the contrast both presented to the actual miseries of the scene, that the oldest performers were struck dumb; the women weeping silently, the men grave and pitying. They all knew the boy, and had seen him go on the wire with his father many a time.

Little Sam Chase, known on the bills as "Master Angelo, Prince of the Wire," was a favorite on both sides of the footlights—on one for his beauty and daring, on the other from his sweet temper and modest, quiet ways. He was not a common show boy, full of slang and saucy ways. His father, with all his faults, had kept the boy pure, and taught him how to read.

No one knew much about Charley Chase, except that it was rumored he had a wife in England, from whence he had come. Now he was dying.

Not quite dead yet, though he had fallen on his head, and a great pool of blood lay under it, crimsoning the boards. His heart yet beat feebly, and the grand muscular limbs quivered at intervals, as he lay, faint moans escaping his lips.

Then came a bustle in the wings, and the hard, selfish-looking manager came into the group, followed by another man, saying in a high, cracked voice:

"Out of the way, all of you! Here's the doctor."

They shrank aside, all but the boy, who kept on moaning, "Father—father!" till the doctor asked, in a low voice:

"Who is he?"

"His son, sir," whispered one of the stage carpenters, an honest-looking fellow.

The doctor's face twitched, but he said nothing till he had examined the man carefully. As he finished, Carlo gave a sort of sigh, stretched himself out as if tired, and relaxed his limbs, a gray pallor creeping over his face.

Then the doctor touched the boy's shoulder, and said gently:

"My poor child, he is dead!"

The child looked up at him as if dazed, and the doctor added:

"Where is your mother?"

"I don't know, sir," the child answered, simply. "Father said he was going to send for her, but I don't know where she is."

The doctor turned away to the proprietor, whose face wore a vexed, fretful look.

"Don't you know where the child's mother is?" he asked.

"No. How can I tell?—how can I tell where my people live?" cried the manager, ill-temperedly. "Ain't it bad enough to have this happen? It'll kill the business—kill it for a good week; and another such will kill it for sure. Get in the papers; police come, and stop the wire business. Best act I had. It's too bad—too bad! It'll cost me a thousand dollars. Chase never had a cent—not a cent. I'll have to bury him, and keep the kid for awhile, till the thing blows over. Coroner's inquest, too! Never was such luck!"

And he grasped his hair with both hands in the extremity of his vexation, till the doctor said:

"How came the wire to break? I saw it part, right before the man, with a twang."

The manager turned to the stage carpenter.

"You stretched the wire, Steve. Was Carlo there?"

"Yes, sir," replied Steve, readily. "We both looked at every foot, sir. It was all sound."

"Here's the end where it broke, sir," said one of the women, timidly. "It's all green, sir."

The doctor turned quickly round, and saw her holding the end of the copper wire that still dangled from the flies.

"Get the curtain up," he said, briefly. "The place is clear now. I saw the police coming in."

"Ay, ay, clear enough," grunted the manager. "Put her up, boys; put her up."

The curtain rose again, revealing the bare auditorium, with a few policemen sending out the last remnants of the crowd, the waiter-girls huddled in whispering groups in the center.

"That wire has been tampered with," declared the doctor, after a close examination. "An acid has been used on it. Can any one get up there besides the performers?"

"No one, sir," returned Steve, readily. "Why, it's as much as a man's life's worth. They can't get to it from the flies, except where it's fastened, and it ain't parted there."

"Have you any other wire-walkers in the company now?" asked the doctor of the manager.

The manager scowled.

"No. Wish we had. I'd put him on quick, you can bet your life. We had one man, but he wasn't a patch on Carlo."

"Where is he?" asked the doctor.

"Off in Boston. Went the day before yesterday, in Carlo's second week."

"What was his name?" pursued the doctor.

The manager stared.

"His name? What's that to you? You ain't got no right to question me. Time enough for the coroner to do that."

"Oh, never mind," returned the doctor, coldly. "The coroner will be in here in a very short time, for the police have notified him. Meanwhile, this wire has been tampered with, and this man, you say, is a professional rival of the dead man. I'll get the coroner to ask you. As for this child, you will take care of him, for common humanity, I presume."

He looked down at the boy, who was staring at them alternately in a dazed, helpless way, with all a child's vague curiosity at words he did not understand.

"Oh, yes, I'll take care of Sammy," replied the other, not urgently. "We'll have him on the wire with Nichols when this blows over."

Suddenly the boy jumped up from where he had been kneeling, and screamed out:

"Oh, no, no! Not again, not again!"

He was shaking as if in a fit, and the doctor caught him in his arms, soothing him:

"No, they sha'n't put you on the wire any more, my child. Are you afraid?"

The boy nodded as he looked at his dead father, and whispered confidentially:

"Nichols hated father. He'll kill me too, if I go with him."

The doctor started slightly. The child was young to be so intelligent, but he evidently had understood something of the conversation, and had confided in the only kind face he saw near him.

He had no time to say more, when they saw some police coming toward the stage, preceding a big fat man, with a stolid, German face, whom the doctor recognized as the coroner.

CHAPTER II.

THE VERDICT.

THE coroner came up as one having authority, followed by a small crowd of curious young men, who hoped to be impaneled into a jury, and were so impaneled, and he proceeded at once to browbeat every one who knew anything about the matter, and examine every one who did not, as coroners will.

He looked at the body carefully, and questioned the doctor very closely as to the injury which caused the death, of which there was no doubt, while he slighted the story of the wire having been tampered with, and said that the case was clear as daylight.

The manager was responsible for allowing a dangerous exhibition, and it was a wonder such accidents had not happened before. He wanted to get away home that night, and hurried on a verdict, "that the deceased came to his death from the unavoidable breaking of a wire, and the jury censure the management for gross and criminal carelessness in allowing such dangerous exhibitions."

And the jury did as they were bid, with a refreshing readiness and unanimity that greatly pleased the coroner, who closed the case with the remark to the manager:

"You better mind vot you toes, Meester Hooper, after dis, or py te chiminy Hokey, we shoots you oop on te injunction mit te order of te gourt. Don't it?"

And then they all went out; and the poor underpaid stage performers, with a quiet unselfishness that only belongs to the poor in such cases, proceeded to make up a little purse for the benefit of the child thus left fatherless among them, while the manager arranged for the funeral, as a thing that had to be done.

The dead acrobat was buried in a cheap pine coffin, with a few shabbily-dressed men and women round the grave, and a little boy in worn black clothes, standing, gazing dreamily into the dark pit where the clods rattled on the lid, with the hand of Steve, the stage carpenter, on his shoulder. He did not cry at all, but he was very white in the face, and they saw him wince and shiver when the first clod fell on the box.

When it was all over, and the little group of mourners dispersed, Steve was left alone with the boy by the grave, and said to him quietly:

"Come, Sammy, boy, don't fret. I ain't got no kids of my own, and as long as you're a good boy, you shall stay with me."

The child made a quick motion toward his bumble friend, and for the first time his eyes filled, and he began to choke and sob.

"Oh, Steve, Steve," he said, brokenly, "I wish I was a man now!"

The carpenter seemed puzzled. They were the first words the child had spoken to any one since the death of his father.

"Well, well," he answered; "you'll grow up soon enough, please God, Sammy. Don't be in too much of a hurry, my boy. It's a hard world, as you'll find out before you're a man. But what do you want to be a man now for?"

He saw the child's fair young face change into a look of hatred, appalling in one so young, as Sammy answered, huskily:

"To kill Nichols, Steve!" It's so long to wait, so long, so long, so—so—"

And then the child nature broke down under the strain of his morbid fancy, and the poor little fellow was sobbing hysterically, shaking as if in a fit, and in such an unstrung state that the worthy carpenter, frightened to death, caught him up in his arms and ran away to the cemetery gate to find a doctor, thinking Sammy was going to die on his hands.

Very near dying was little Sam Chase; and poor Steve, in his bachelor home, was hard put to it to keep the child from sinking under a low nervous fever. Had it not been for the doctor who had first attended the child's father, and whose kind heart and interest in the child brought him at Steve's call, little Sam Chase would have succumbed to the shock, and this story never have been written.

As it was, six weeks later he was convalescent, and apparently had forgotten everything that had passed, except that he had no father or mother. His memory as to the past was a blank. He could no longer read or write, as he had done before his sickness, and did not even know his own name.

He was quiet and gentle as ever, and seemed to know Steve and the doctor as friends; but that was all. He grew stronger rapidly, and was soon out on the streets, and taken to the theater by Steve, to see if the scene would be recalled to him. He stared round him vaguely, till he saw a new wire stretched across the stage, when he shuddered, and asked in a low tone:

"What's that? What's that?"

"That's Nichols's wire," said one of the men, watching him closely. "He goes on to-night. Don't you remember him, Sammy?"

The boy shook his head, saying, with a sigh:

"I remember—no—I can't remember now."

The doctor had come with Steve to the theater on purpose to test the boy, and he whispered to the puzzled carpenter:

"It may be the best for the child. Such cases sometimes happen. Where is this Nichols?"

Steve pulled his sleeve and moved his head slightly, as a very handsome, powerfully-built man, clean-shaven, with a dark Italian face and brilliant black eyes, walked out from the side scenes in an old suit of tights, and made a jump on the stretched wire, which was so low that no danger could come from a fall therefrom.

"That's him, rehearsin'," he whispered. "He's good, but Lord, he ain't a patch on Carlo."

The doctor watched Sammy closely; but could detect no symptom of recognition. The boy stared at the tight wire performer unwinkingly, till Nichols had practiced several easy feats, when the man looked down and said:

"Who's that kid? Is he the one that's to do the Cupid act with me?"

His tones were slightly nasal, with a New England twang to them, and Steve answered sternly:

"Not with you, Mr. Nichols. That's poor Carlo's son. Surely you don't want him."

Nichols turned on the wire and sprung down, advancing toward the carpenter.

"Why not?" he asked, sharply. "He's got to make a living as well as the rest of us, hasn't he? I'm not afraid to take him, if he's not afraid to go on. There's no superstition about me."

The boy, as the doctor watched him, listened to all this in the same impassive manner, till Steve, encouraged by the lowering faces of the men round him answered:

"It ain't for me to say anything about it, Mr. Nichols, but I'm taking care of the boy now, seeing he ain't got any friends, and as long as I'm doing that he don't go on the wire with you, of all men in the world!"

The smooth, generally smiling face of Nichols suddenly changed to an evil, selfish, cruel look, as he asked:

"Why not? Tell me what you mean?"

"Because," said Steve, slowly, "folks about here say you tampered with the wire and killed his father out of jealous."

CRACK!

A sound like the snap of a whip, and the carpenter dropped senseless on the stage like a slaughtered ox, under a sudden, treacherous blow on the side of the neck, delivered, with such lightning rapidity none noticed how it was done, by Nichols, without a word of warning.

Then the man smiled defiantly at the rest, and said in his sharp, clear tones:

"I've heard enough of this, and I'm going to stop it. The next man that opens his head against my character, I'll have him arrested and make him prove it. Chalk that down!"

They were all afraid of him but the doctor, and they saw the manager coming from the front of the house, attracted by the sound of the blow. The doctor called out:

"Mr. Hooper, this is infamous. A more cowardly and unprovoked assault I never saw in my life on an inoffensive man. I am going for a policeman at once."

"What are you doing in here anyhow?" asked the manager, looking pale but angry. "You don't belong to the company. Get out of here."

"Do you understand that this man just knocked your carpenter senseless in a manner perfectly unprovoked?" asked the doctor fiercely.

"No, I don't, and I don't want nothing to do with it," was the answer. "I suppose Steve was sassy and Mr. Nichols gave him one. Served him right. Go and complain. I don't care."

For a moment the doctor hesitated. Nichols stood where he had struck down Steve, with a very dangerous look on his face, an ugly customer to tackle, and the poor carpenter was slowly opening his eyes; but it was at the child that the doctor looked.

Little Sam Chase stood staring at Nichols as if recollection were returning, and suddenly, to the amazement of all present, he flew at the tall, powerful athlete, caught him round the knee, and dug his teeth into the muscular thigh with a low snarl like a wild beast; while Nichols, in his surprise, uttered a cry of pain and fury, snatched up the child in his clutch, with the scowl of a demon, shook him furiously and dashed him down by the reviving carpenter, but not before the half-crazed boy had drawn the blood from his foe.

Then there was a scene of confusion, for the boy had been stunned by his fall, and the stage hands made a rush to help him, crying "Shame!"

When it was over, Nichols had gone away, Steve had recovered his senses, and the boy was quite quiet as he said to the doctor:

"I remember now, I remember. I'll never forget again."

CHAPTER III.

HATCHES BATTENED DOWN.

SOME years after this scene the steamer Mexican Monarch was crossing the Atlantic on her way to New York in the month of December, when she broke her propeller.

The weather had been unusually stormy during the whole voyage, even for that time of

year, and all the winds had been dead in the teeth of the Monarch. She had been swept repeatedly by heavy seas, which had carried away everything movable on the decks on the fifth day out.

On the sixth she was boarded by a huge wave, that swept away the caboose and smoking-room; drowned two sailors; broke the first mate's leg, and bruised several men so severely that they had to be sent below.

The damage was, after much trouble, repaired, when a violent throb in the engine, on the morning of the seventh day, told that something had happened to the machinery, and it was soon found, from the rapid way in which the screw churned the water, that one of its blades had been broken off.

Still the wind and sea rather increased than diminished, and the ship, with less powers of resistance, burrowed her way along through the billows for still another day, when again that throb of the engine was felt and the whirling round of the now useless propeller-shaft told the story of a fresh disaster.

The defective casting had broken short off, and the Mexican Monarch lay as helpless as a log on the billows.

For the first few moments all was hurry, confusion and distress on the disabled vessel. Deprived of her propelling power, and having no sail set, she wallowed in the trough of the sea, great green waves curling over her and pouring torrents of water on her decks, so that it seemed as if she must soon founder. But for the fact that the hatches had been closed, she would doubtless have filled and gone down in a few minutes, and as it was, no one dared to stir from the place where he was clinging to rope or belaying pin, for fear of being swept away into the howling waste of waters.

Overboard flitted the ghostly white sheets of thin vapor, known to the sailors as "scud," across the black and solid-looking clouds that shut out the light of the sun, passing with a rapid flight, torn and ragged in outline, attesting the fearful violence of the gale.

Not a living thing could be seen on the face of the waters save the ship. She seemed to be all alone, deserted in the midst of the war of elements.

She had sailed out of her port in all the glory of her power, one of the largest steamers of her class, three thousand tons burden, with engines of the strength of two thousand horses. She had made the passage repeatedly in eight days; had faced the severest gales; had earned the reputation of a ship that could defy all weathers, with a captain and crew equal to any emergency; yet there she lay now, in the trough of the sea, a mere speck on the great ocean, with no more power to help herself and her passengers than a stick thrown into a mill-race.

So at least it seemed, for a good hour after the faithless casting broke in half, under the repeated blows of the water, while the engine went laboring on its useless work till the engineer let off the steam.

Blow after blow followed from the waves, as if each had a special malice against the unfortunate ship, and then at last the wind caught the bare rigging of her forward masts and caused her to move slowly on, rising on the waves instead of wallowing in the deep trough between them.

And then might be seen the indomitable courage and inventive resource of the true sailor, without which the hugest ship and the most powerful engines are as naught.

No sooner was a moment's respite to be found between the blows of the waves—a few seconds' interval, during which the decks were clear—than dozens of dark figures were seen climbing up into the rigging on all sides.

The waves might sweep over the deck and clutch at them as they ascended, but every foot of upward progress took them further out of their reach, and at last came one happy moment when the foretopsail fell from its lashings and swelled out with a report like a cannon, watched anxiously by all on deck, and—stood the strain.

From that moment the Mexican Monarch was under control of her commander and crew—from that moment man's wit utilized the wind to fight the waves, and carry the good ship out of reach of the green mountains that came racing after her as hungrily as ever.

They might follow till they broke their mighty hearts into foaming clouds of spray, salt and bitter with disappointed rage; but the ship flew on before them, and no drop of water touched her deck thereafter.

What the power of two thousand horses failed to do, the power of a few square yards of canvas, imprisoning the tempest in its folds, had accomplished.

The ship ceased to roll in the trough of the sea, and sped on once more, not in the direction in which she would, but at least away from danger.

And then the anxious frown faded from the captain's brow, the helmsman stood up and grasped the spokes of the wheel more firmly, and the commander of the Monarch said to his acting chief officer, who stood near him:

"That was a narrow escape, Mr. Brush. I

began to think it was all day with us. Sound the pumps, sir."

On scuttled the ship before the howling gale, still in advance of the fast following seas, when Brush came back, and reported:

"No water in the hold, sir; but the people in the steerage are kicking up a devil of a bobbery between decks."

"Ay, ay; it must be pretty hot down there, and I don't blame them," returned the chief, gloomily. "It's bad enough for us, but they can't see or hear anything down there. I think we might venture to open the main hatch, Mr. Brush. The seas don't seem to be boarding us any more now. Give them some air."

The mate called some sailors and removed the fastenings of the main hatch, which had been carefully secured the day the first blade of the propeller broke, on account of the danger from seas coming aboard.

Even the stout sailors shuddered at the horrible effluvium that belched its way up on deck as soon as they removed the covering, and Brush muttered to himself as he looked down:

"Good heavens! That's enough to kill a horse, leave alone a man."

The ladder leading up to the now open hatchway was crowded with men and women, white and ghastly, eyes sunken and haggard, mouths gasping for breath.

Some tried to climb up on deck, and fell weakly back; others laughed in an idiotic manner as they saw the light for the first time in thirty-six hours, while several women screamed out, as if in pain, to feel the fresh, cold air from above enter their lungs like a knife, used as they were to the foul accumulations, imprisoned between decks, from several hundred people.

Only one person seemed to have kept enough strength to move to any purpose, and he crawled up the ladder and threw himself down, gasping, on the deck, a powerful, muscular man, with the shoulders of a Hercules, the waist of a lady and a handsome dark face that looked like that of an Italian.

It was in perfectly good English, however, with a certain New England twang, that he said to the mate:

"If you'd kept that hatch down another hour you'd have had a crop of murders on your soul, old man. Some of 'em are dead now, I believe."

He spoke between gasps, like a man almost exhausted, and the sailors looked at each other pityingly to see him.

As for the mate, he looked down the hatchway in silence for a minute, and then went back to the captain, to whom he said, with a grave face:

"There's trouble in the steerage, sir. We'd best send the doctor down. I'm afraid that ship-fever's started."

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE STEERAGE.

THE captain looked very grave when he heard the news, and answered:

"I hope not, for heaven's sake. Tell Dr. Shaw to go down at once. No, I'll go with him. Take the deck while I'm gone."

He went to the door of the round-house, about the only structure on deck that had escaped the ravages of the storm, and entered the cabin, which was nearly empty, all the cabin passengers being seasick in their berths, the stewards having rest for a little space of time.

The ship's surgeon was soon called out, and, accompanied by the captain, went forward into the steerage by a door through one of the bulkheads.

"Why didn't you tell me what was going on below decks?" asked the captain as they went forward.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"What could you have done? Nothing. The hatches had to be closed, and if we had opened them we should all have been at the bottom by this time. It's one of those things that can't be helped, and nothing will help us but fine weather. Where are we now? Any chance of getting to New York, or shall we have to put back to England to repair?"

"If the wind keeps as it is, we shall be back in England before many days; but if she shifts, I shall try to pull through."

"Great heavens, what a stench! I've smelt it before."

"So have I," quoth the doctor. "It's the smell of ship-fever; and, what's more, if we don't get all these people out in the air, pretty quick, we'll have to bury a good many. Once it begins; it spreads like wildfire."

In fact, the further they went forward, the more painful were the spectacles that met their eyes.

Men, women and children lay on the rude bunks that constituted the only furniture of the steerage, too weak to move, some of them dying, others dead.

The peculiar and sickening odor of the cargo in the hold, mingled with the exhalations of so many bodies, confined in an atmosphere nearly turned into carbonic acid, was so terrible that both captain and doctor turned pale and were driven back on deck by it.

As they turned away, the captain heard a

faint, hollow laugh from one of the bunks, and a woman's voice said:

"It sickens them, Maggie. How would they like to have been down here, for all the time we have!"

Then she laughed again. Such a laugh! It brought the tear to the eye of the rugged sailor as he hurried to the ladder, and his voice was husky as he said to the doctor:

"I must give them air, at any hazard."

He climbed up on deck and ordered the sailors to open the fore-hatch, though the danger was great that at any moment the ship might plunge head foremost into another billow, and fill up the narrow space between decks.

"But the poor creatures might as well be drowned as smothered," said the captain, and he went to the helm himself and directed the steering of the vessel, to avoid as much as possible the danger which had compelled the closing of the hatches.

And as soon as the fore-hatch was opened the effect between decks was wonderful. The gale, which was so fierce without, had this in its favor, that, within two minutes, it had driven out the foul atmosphere below, and supplied its place with life-giving oxygen.

The pale, half-insensible men and women below breathed it in and shuddered with cold, wishing almost that they had been left alone in their deadly stupor; but, for all that, it invigorated them after awhile, and they crawled out of their bunks and staggered up on deck, just as the red ghost of the sun peeped out for a moment between two dark clouds, through a gray veil of mist, and the captain said to the doctor:

"Thank Heaven! The gale is breaking."

Inside of an hour from that time the blue sky could be seen between the fast skurrying clouds; the decks of the disabled steamer were covered with people; the cabin passengers left their berths; the cook lighted his fire again, and the Mexican Monarch, with all the sail set that she could carry on her sturdy, though short masts, was laid once more on her original course, and everything in comparative order aboard.

The captain was, for some time after that, too busy to think much of the condition of the steerage passengers; but when at last they served supper in the cabin, and he sat down to his first regular meal for a week, he asked the doctor how things were going on there.

"Better than I feared," was the reply. "There's only one case left of real ship-fever, and that's a woman; but there are eleven dead, including six children. We must get them out before daylight."

He spoke in a low tone, so that none but the commander might hear him, and the latter nodded gloomily, as he muttered:

"Well off it's no worse, doctor. Woman got any one with her?"

"Nothing but a child. It's a hard case. She was coming over to join her husband, with a little girl, and the young one hasn't a soul to look to except—"

The doctor hesitated, as if he didn't like to say any more.

"Except what? Speak out, man."

"Except a boy who belongs to a pretty hard case aboard here, an acrobat going over to a circus."

"Poor little thing!" muttered the captain, in a commiserating way. "If they get hold of her, she's gone. I'll go and see to the case myself, doctor. Any chance of recovery?"

The doctor shook his head.

"No. She'll go to-night, I think. Do you remember that woman who laughed at us when the stench drove us out. It was she. The fresh air finished her up a little quicker, that's all. It's just like the— Were you ever at Vera Cruz?"

"No. What about it?"

"Well, it's about the hottest place I ever saw, and the worst for yellow fever; but the first norther in the winter drives out the fever sure, till the spring. But it's curious that, if any one's sick of the fever when the norther comes on, it kills him, as sure as it drives out the fever from the others. Just so with that rush of fresh air we gave them to-day. It drove out the fever, but it killed the woman. Whenever you're ready, I am."

"Wait till after dark, and I'll order the gratings rigged, doctor. Keep it from the cabin passengers if you can."

The sun showed himself in full for some half an hour before setting, and the sea had gone down considerably, so that everything looked comparatively quiet and comfortable aboard the Monarch when the passengers went to bed, and for some hours afterward.

But when the second watch went on in the night, there was the sound of shuffling feet coming up the main hatch of the ship; and, one after another, the sailors and the poor steerage passengers brought up no less than eleven shrouded figures, on long stretchers, which were laid in order on the lee side of the vessel.

There were sounds of stifled sobbing from the muffled groups that surrounded them, but little loud outcry; for the visitation had been too sudden and general, to admit of ordinary grief.

Two women had lost their husbands; one man his aged mother, and another man had lost, at one blow, his wife and only sister, while six lit-

tle bundles told of as many children of poverty, taken at once from a world of suffering, while their parents stood by and looked on at the scene, gloomy and hopeless.

Down below in the steerage, the captain and the doctor, by the light of a dingy lantern, were looking at the woman who had laughed at them.

She was past laughing now, as she lay on her back, with her glassy eyes gazing up at the beams overhead, her mouth half open, only faintly breathing. The dead yellowish-white of her face told that she was going fast, and by her side sat a girl of about twelve, whose coarse brown calico dress and plaid shawl seemed insufficient to keep her from shivering, though she was trying to shelter and console a little child whom she had taken on her lap and covered over with a shawl.

The doctor nudged the captain and whispered:

"That's the child. It's a girl."

"Who's the other child?" whispered back the other.

"One of the passengers. Poor of course. They're the only kind-hearted ones I know."

"Who's that man?" muttered the captain; and, as he spoke, he glanced across some bunks, to where a man was watching the scene intently, with a boy beside him, who was evidently his son, from the great likeness between them.

Both faces were handsome, that of the man especially, with a dark Italian beauty that was only marred by a certain crafty look in the black eyes.

He was watching them closely, and the eye of the captain met his, when he came forward instantly and said softly:

"Good-evening, captain. A sad sight; very sad. Poor woman! Poor child! I've been down here all the time, and I'm a strong man; but I was nearly giving in. Have you any objection to my taking care of that child, when it is over? The poor little thing will be all alone."

He spoke with an easy frankness that caused a wonder how such a man should be in a steerage bunk; and his dress was not that of a very poor person.

The captain hesitated.

"But this child is a girl," he said, "and you don't seem to have a wife here."

"My wife is waiting for me in New York, and I promise the child every comfort and a good education," returned the other earnestly. "I know her father well, and I promise to find him, if he is to be found."

"Who is her father?" asked the captain.

"He is in the same business as I am," said the stranger, "and his name is Chase. I've known Charley Chase since we were apprentices together. Ah, look there. She's going!"

In fact, at that very moment the dying woman turned her head toward them with a glare that looked wild and terrified, while she put out her hand gropingly.

In a moment the girl at her side spoke:

"Is it the child? She's here."

And she took the poor wandering hand in her own and placed it on the light curls of the child, which, the bystanders could now see, was sleeping heavily.

A faint smile crossed the lips of the sick woman. Out of the stupor of approaching death the mother's instinct struggled in that smile, and her eyes lost their frightened glare, but no word escaped her lips.

The hand remained where the girl had placed it, on the head of the sleeping child; the breath grew fainter and fainter, and at last the arm fell down by the side of the rude bunk, and the doctor said, gravely:

"Take the child away now. It's all over."

That night there were twelve shrouded forms laid on the grating by the lee gangway of the Mexican Monarch, and by the faint light of a ship's lantern, the burial service was read by the captain in low tones, the watch on deck and a few steerage passengers being the only spectators.

At last came the sullen plunges of the bodies into the darkness of the great deep, and the sailors uttered a sigh of relief as the last corpse fell from the side of the ship. It was over.

The captain closed his book; the sailors dispersed quietly to their duties; the little group of mourners went below to their cheerless couches, with only a few muffled sobs, and the ship sped on her way to the west, as the moon, in her last quarter, rose in the east between the now scattered clouds, and tipped the waves with gold.

They were gone, those shrouded forms, and the sea had swallowed them up, as it had many another before them; but the living were as much alive as ever, and the fresh breeze had swept the foul disease from the vessel.

"Better twelve deaths than a whole ship's company," said the captain to himself, as he paced the quarter-deck, thinking over the scene he had just assisted to make solemn; "but I wish there was some one on board to take charge of that child. If it was a boy I wouldn't mind, but a girl— However, it's no business of mine."

He shook off the gloomy thoughts, and they returned no more during the voyage, till the Mexican Monarch, twelve days overdue, was being towed up the Narrows into New York

harbor, all her passengers on deck, looking eagerly toward the shore.

Then it happened that the captain noticed one of the steerage passengers, a handsome man with a dark face, up in the fore-rigging, waving his hat to some one in a tug below, which had just come out to meet them, and turning again to speak to some one else on their own decks.

"Whose boat is that?" the captain asked the pilot, pointing to the tug.

"That! That's old Hooper's party," returned the other, with some disdain. "I suppose you've got some circus-riders aboard, and the old fraud's come down the bay to make all the advertising he can out of it. That fellow in the fore-rigging must be one of them."

As he spoke, they heard the man in the rigging shout down:

"All right. Nobody of our party sick, and I've got a treasure for you!"

"What's her name?" cried a high, cracked voice from the tug.

The man in the shrouds shouted back:

"Corinne!"

CHAPTER V.

CORINNE.

THE streets of New York were in that pleasant state which comes, after a heavy fall of snow and a subsequent thaw have tested to the utmost the efficiency of the street-clearing department, sixteen years after Charley Chase died. The car tracks were pools of salt water, with a scum on the top; the gutters were buried under mounds of brown stuff, streaked with white, that had once been snow; and the sidewalks were an inch deep in slush.

Yet the streets were full of people for all that, and the blue glare of electric lights sent long, quivering streams through the fog, while the dull orange of the gas lamps in the store windows looked sickly beside them.

Every one who could ride rode, and the cars were crammed, while hackmen reaped a harvest.

Around "Hooper's Great International Hippodrome and Menagerie," as the bill's announcing its "Grand Opening Night," described it, the crowd was as dense as if the weather had been fine.

It took two policemen at each box-office to keep the buyers of tickets in line, while the speculators were rushing up and down the sidewalks outside, trying to dispose of their wares at an advance by means of the familiar argument:

"Give you a reserved seat, best place in the house. No time lost in waiting. Crowd won't be in till the show's half over, and then you'll only have standing-room. Three dollars, sir. All right. I've got change."

In a little room up-stairs, Mr. Hooper, a large fat man, with a face like a frosted apple, all covered with wrinkles and set in a perpetual smile that meant nothing but self-satisfaction, chuckled as he heard the tramping of feet in the passages below, and remarked to Mr. Gittuppe, his partner:

"Squire, we've got 'em this time, sure."

Mr. Gittuppe was nearly as large and fat as Mr. Hooper, but his face had a stolid gravity about it that was made more impressive by a pointed beard, only his cheeks being shaven.

He had thick, sensual lips, and his voice was rather gruff, as he removed his cigar long enough to say:

"You bet we've got 'em. You've got to make 'em a speech to-night, Hooper."

Hooper's smile broadened, and he cackled a little, like a contented hen.

"Reckon I will; reckon I will. Give the guys* something for their money, hey, Gittuppe!"

Gittuppe knit his brows ill-temperedly. The remark seemed to annoy him.

"They're getting their money's worth now, out of my part of the show alone. It's a darned sight better than you ever run. Corinne alone's worth the price of admission."

Hooper cackled again, sneeringly:

"Which price! Back rows or boxes! I say, Gittuppe, what are you working that girl for?"

Gittuppe puffed at his cigar a moment, and then looked his partner in the face with his usual stolid gravity, as he replied:

"What do you work girls for? What you can get out of 'em, don't you? I notice you don't pay 'em any more than they're worth. No more do I. Corinne will draw. She's young, and she does her act well."

"She hasn't done it yet before the guys," said Hooper, interrupting.

"She'll do it to-night, and just as well as the oldest woman in the ring. Don't you forget it, Hooper. It's a cold day when I get left, and I'll trust any of Cola's apprentices not to break down before the guys. See if your Madame Pierrelli does as well, and you can blow. I saw her fall six times at rehearsal yesterday."

*Guys. The common show word for spectators who pay money to see a show. The term is rather one of contempt as applied to them; but the proprietor of a show also goes by the name of the "Main Guy," in which sense the word is probably nautical in origin, the same as our ordinary "guy ropes" to support a tent or mast.

Hooper listened, with the same smile that he always wore, to his partner's boasts, and then asked, as if the other had not spoken:

"Well, what are you working her for? Is it for yourself, or some one else?"

Gittuppe made no answer, till he had made a few last puffs at his cigar which he threw into the grate.

Then he rose up, gave himself a shake, looked steadily at his partner, and said:

"Mr. Hooper, you ask too many questions. I'm going down to look after the show."

Without another word he opened the door and went down the rickety stairs—left so, because the economical principles of the "Great Combination" did not admit of money being spent for the comfort of its employees as long as they could do their work without the expenditure—somehow.

Hooper shrugged his shoulders slightly and followed him down to the corridor, now jammed with people, while the buzz of conversation was incessant.

The old man's face changed at once to a querulous expression, and he hurried up to a man who was leaning quietly against the wall, looking at the crowd, as if he had no particular interest in life.

"What's this? What's this? Mr. Brown, this won't do, this won't do," cried Hooper, in his sharp, cracked tones. "You're not paid to stand against walls, sir. Look at those guys, sir; look at them. They don't know where to go, sir; don't know where to go. Get that whistle of yours started, or, we'll have to look out for some one who'll earn his wages and toot when he's paid for it."

Mr. Brown was a small man, and he wilted under the eye of Hooper, whose usual smile had changed to a look of cold, concentrated selfishness, that became it equally well.

He slid off through the crowd in silence, and in a few moments more the shrill notes of the steam calliope went howling through the building, and the crowd, as the astute Hooper had known they would, made a rush into the vast amphitheater and left the entrance free.

As soon as this was accomplished, the old manager strolled around among the other employees of the show, stirring each of them up in some way or other, and leaving them all with an uncomfortable idea that they had been shirking their duty and had been found out by the great Hooper, till he heard the band begin to play and knew that the ring performance had begun.

Then he strolled round under the seats to the dressing room, and chuckled to himself the moment he got there, for, near the door which led to the ring, he saw his partner, Gittuppe, with his hands in his pockets, smoking his eternal cigar, and apparently much interested in what was going on in the ring, though it was only Madame Pierrelli, riding four horses at once, which all the world has seen before.

He said nothing; for it was Hooper's nature to keep all his jokes to himself, unless he saw a chance to hurt some one with them, but he watched Gittuppe closely, and noticed that, every now and then, he turned his head slightly toward the door of the ladies' dressing-room, as if expecting some one.

Old Hooper turned round as if hunting for something, and beckoning to a boy, who ran up eagerly with a bundle of the programmes, proud of being noticed by the great Hooper.

"What's the next act, sonny?" the old man whispered, with one of his wheedling smiles. "Hush! don't speak loud. I don't want any one to know I'm here."

Prouder than ever to share a mystery with the manager, the boy whispered eagerly:

"Signor Cola's next, sir, with Corinne and the cannon act. Then comes Mr. Fowle, with the bareback, and the Flying Man next. That's all before intermission, sir."

Hooper patted the boy's head, as he alone knew how to pat a boy's head, saying:

"You're a very smart boy, sonny. Let me see. How o'd are you?"

He put his hand into his pocket as he said this, and smiled benignantly.

"Fourteen, sir," was the reply, while the boy's eyes glistened with anticipation.

"Ah! yes, yes, yes. Go to Sunday-school?"

"Yes, sir." This lie with a small gulp.

"You don't smoke ever. Do you?"

"Never, sir. I hate it." Another little gulp.

"Ah, yes, yes, yes. Very good boy. Terrible bad habit smoking. Glad you don't, glad you don't. Look at me. Here I am, nearly seventy years of age, and I haven't an ache or pain, all owing to not smoking or drinking. Keep to your temperance principles, my boy, and never neglect Sunday-school, and you'll end in owning a show as big as this, some day. Trot along, trot along."

He closed with a singularly abrupt change of manner, and his face put on its usual look of selfish good-humor as he cackled out the last words. The boy, blushing crimson, as if he had been detected in a lie, went off to his business. The fact was, that the Sunday-school story was a fiction, and the no smoking another, and "or" how the boy thought that the manager had found him out, whereas Hooper was not thinking

about him at all, but had simply reeled him off a moral lecture to keep him in good-humor, and because it was the man's nature to wheedle every one, even a child, as long as he wanted anything out of them, and then to treat them as if they no longer existed.

The manager had finished with the boy; for at that moment a gentlemen in the most fastidious of evening dresses, with a white tie of irreproachable purity, and a four carat solitaire diamond in his embroidered shirt-front, came out from the men's room, drawing on his kid gloves, and advanced to Gittuppe, whom he saluted familiarly.

This gentleman's face was dark, handsome and bearded, and the tones of his voice were those of a New Englander, as he said to Gittuppe:

"Well, we're all ready, whenever the Madam comes off. Where's Mr. Hooper? I want him to see this act."

Old Hooper immediately retreated behind a wing of the stables, and, after taking ten steps in the opposite direction, came bustling back as if he had just come in.

He did this because it was his nature to be sly and he wanted to hear all he could about Gittuppe and this new girl, who had been so extensively advertized.

"Well, Cola, how are you, how are you?" he began, with his usual wheedling cordiality, when he had something to gain. "All ready for the new act? Let me see, what is it, what is it, what is it?"

He knew perfectly well, but he wanted to mortify Gittuppe and Cola, by pretending forgetfulness.

"It's the cannon act, Mr. Hooper," said Cola in a deep, grave voice. He was a man of great dignity of appearance, his beard as black as the raven's wing.

"Cannon act, cannon act? What's that, what's that?" cackled Hooper.

"We shoot Corinne out of a cannon into a net," replied Cola sharply; "and then she dives from the roof of the building into another, fifty feet below. Any more questions, Mr. Hooper? The act will be on, in another minute."

Hooper smiled, like a man well satisfied with himself, as he saw Cola's irritation, and answered, with his usual cackle:

"No offense, no offense. Don't like these acts myself, but we shall see. Here comes Madam. Now then, where's your girl, where's your girl, and all the rest of the fake?"*

As he spoke, the clapping of hands was heard overhead from the seats, and Madame Pierrelli backed out of the ring, courtesying profoundly and kissing her hands to the people all round, French fashion.

Then Cola went to the door of the ladies' room, and called out:

"Hurry up, girls, they're waiting."

"I'm ready, papa," called out the sweetest of voices, and out of the room stepped a girl so lovely in face and figure, so utterly and entirely unlike any circus woman with whom Hooper had ever been brought in contact before, that he actually started, and his wrinkled old face turned grave for the space of one moment.

Corinne was small in size, with a figure like the Venus de Medici and a face that fairly dazzled one. The eyes were dark, very dark blue; the hair rippled in brown curls to her waist, although caught up in a knot behind the head, so that it might not fall over her eyes in violent exercise, and her face was the face of a happy English child, full of high spirits and fun, with perfect innocence in the open sunny smile and frank look of the brave blue eyes.

And yet this innocent-looking child-woman was clad only in silken fleshings, with a little white satin b'dice and trunks, that fitted as close as the fleshings; and her arms, neck and bosom were bare, save for gold ornaments. Something seemed to stick in old Hooper's throat as Cola said:

"Mamzelle Corinne, Mr. Hooper."

"Howdodo, howdodo, my dear?" he cackled; and that was all he could say for a minute.

As for the girl, she looked up to him in the innocent reverence of a child before the famous Hooper, and as she said "Good-evening, sir," she looked at him with great curiosity.

Old Hooper had had daughters of his own, and he could not help looking regretfully after this lovely little creature, as the bell rung and she tripped out, beside Cola, into the open ring, where she was received with a burst of applause.

"Poor child!" he muttered to himself, and it is certain that the exclamation did him more honor than anything he had yet said.

The girl went out into the ring, and Hooper and Gittuppe watched her from their station

* *Fake.* Another very common show word, rather contemptuous, applied to a performance in which there is not much real difficulty, but merely a clever deception or advertising scheme. This word came from the London thieves' slang—"to fake" being to steal, but its show sense is different. Conjurers are frequently called "fakers" in show talk, so also ventriloquists, who pretend to talk from the belly, when they merely keep their lips still. "Fakir" is a different word altogether, merely used on magicians' bills to look mysterious.

under the seats with an intentness they had not yet shown.

Then, when the act was over, the two men looked at each other, and Gittuppe said, in a vaunting manner:

"Well, does she take or not?"

It was the moment when Corinne had made her terrible dive, head foremost, from the top of the building into the net below, as if into water; and the people, to whom the act was novel, were stamping and shouting their delight, as Cola assisted the girl to retire and she came back.

"She takes well," old Hooper was forced to admit; "but she can't keep it up. Just look at her now."

As the girl came back under the seats it was evident that she was leaning heavily on Cola's arm and staggered as she walked.

"Keep up, Lily," they heard him say. "You don't go on any more till to-morrow; and it wouldn't have happened if you had remembered what I told you."

"Oh, papa!" was all she replied, in a faint tone, "don't make me do it to-morrow! Let Maggie take her turn."

"Well, I'll see, I'll see," answered Cola, basitily, and he took her into the ladies' dressing-room, just as Mr. Fowle, the debonair little bareback rider, came to the entrance in his usual polite way, bowing to Cola and the girl with a kind "Good-evening."

"What's the matter, what's the matter?" muttered old Hooper to Gittuppe.

"Fell a little askew," answered his partner, lightly.

"That's nothing. I've seen them both hurt, so the blood would gush out of their noses, but they're all right next day, and go on as well as ever."

Hooper's sharp little eyes noted that another girl, taller and heavier than Corinne, and rather plainly dressed, came out of the dressing-room, took the lesser one in her arms in a motherly, protecting way, and covered her over with the folds of a great shawl as they disappeared.

"That's the other Corinne, I suppose," he remarked to Gittuppe, in his cracked voice. "Hey! hey! Very good fake—very good fake, if you can work it right. Yes, yes; yes, yes—if you can work it right. But you can't—you can't—you can't! No more likeness—"

"You wait till you see Maggie," retorted Gittuppe, ill-temperedly. "But you couldn't tell 'em apart, when they're made up, with all your smart ways. Here's Cola, now, with Pippa, and that's something you never saw before, with all your Arabian Hippodrome."

As he spoke, out from the men's dressing-room, with Cola by his side, came a young man about twenty-three or four years old, with a face so much like the other's that Hooper cackled to Cola:

"No need to ask who this is, Cola—no need to ask. How are ye, young man? how are ye? how are ye? Glad to see you! What do you do?—what do you do? What's your act?—what's your act?"

Again he knew well enough, and reaped his reward in Cola's irritable rejoinder:

"This is Signor Pippa, the Flying Man, of whom all the world has heard, except Mr. Hooper, it seems. He comes after Fowle, and if he don't bring down the house, my name's not Cola."

Hooper cackled again:

"Very good, very good—first rate, first rate. Name's not Cola? Very good! By the by, what is your name at home?"

"They sometimes call me a sensible man, because I mind my own business, and at other times they say I'm a great fool to work for the International when I can make twice as much on my own hook," retorted Cola, sarcastically. "Any more questions?"

"No, no; very good, very good!" cackled Hooper, not displeased at the apt retort. "Here comes Fowle back. Now put on your Flying Man fake. May as well see it all—he, Gittuppe?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE KING OF THE SHOWMEN.

THE "Flying Man" act, like the "Eagle Swoop" of Corinne, was new to the people, and "took"—in show phrase—wonderfully.

Young Cola, or "Pippa," as he was called on the bills, took his position, lying on his back, on the cushions of a machine called on the bills a "catapult," resembling a huge battlement, bent back against powerful springs.

At the words, "Ready! Go!" he was pitched up in the air like a shuttlecock, turning over and over, nearly eighty feet perpendicular, and fell into a net on the opposite side of the building, unhurt.

The whole interest of the act, which occupied less than five seconds, lay in the wonderful daring required, and the absolute certainty of a horrible death to the performer, should the least miscalculation be made of the curve of his flight.

To old Hooper, who watched it attentively out of the maze of wrinkles that surrounded his cunning old eyes, the interest seemed to be dif-

Champion Sam.

ferent. Accustomed to witness feats involving peril to life and limb, he saw the real danger better than the uninstructed spectators, but saw also that the calculations were made exactly, and the act intrusted to careful and experienced men. That real danger was involved he knew from the fact that Cola superintended the working of the "catapult" personally, and wore a grave, preoccupied face, till the blow was struck which released the catch.

Even the hardened old manager held his breath a moment, as the young man parted on his journey through the air, but he kept his aspect of indifference, and as soon as he saw that Pippa was certain to fall into the net he turned away with a simulated shrug and protrusion of his lips, and remarked coldly to Gittuppe:

"Pretty fair fake for a snap. Is that Cola's kid, or an apprentice?"

Cola, who had watched the old manager out of the corner of his eye, even while his attention was apparently engrossed with the working of the catapult, heard the remark, and answered with his sweetest smile:

"He is my son, Mr. Hoopler, and I put him in to show my entire confidence in the safety of the act, which you will please to remember is no fake, but my exclusive property, covered by patents."

Hoopler listened with his usual frosty smile, and retorted:

"I'm not saying anything against it. It's not my boy, not my boy. Well, Gittuppe, pretty near time to give the candy-butchers* a chance, hey? You don't want me any more to-night. Guess I'll go home."

He said this in a sour manner, for two reasons: He wanted to mortify Cola by treating his acts as not worth further discussion, and he wanted to make Gittuppe ask him a favor in public, which he knew the other was sure to do; for showmen have no hesitation in dropping pride and everything else when money is in question. Gittuppe's usually stolid, sensual face became winning instantly, as he said:

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Hoopler, we value you too much to let you go so easily. Hark, the guys are calling for you. They will have you, you know. Must make them a speech in your own unequalled manner. Worth half the show, on my honor."

Hoopler listened and smiled—the first honest smile he had yet shown—for the man's weak side was vanity, and he swallowed flattery, even when he knew it was insincere. He did not even sting Gittuppe in reply, as he said with affected nonchalance:

"Oh, certainly, if you think it best. They seem to like my nonsense pretty well, don't they?"

"Listen to them," said Gittuppe cordially, as the thunder of feet on the steps over their heads filled the building, mingled with cries of "Hoopler, Hoopler! Speech! speech! Hoopler, Hoopler!"

The old man listened with a smile of gratified vanity, as Gittuppe, with affected anxiety, asked:

"Won't you speak, please?"

"Certainly, certainly. Tell 'em I'm coming," replied Hoopler, and Gittuppe rushed out into the ring, waving his arms frantically and producing immediate silence, when he bellowed, with the lungs of an old ring-master:

"Ladies—and—gentle—men! Mr.—Hoop—ler—is—here—and—with—your—kind—per—mis—sion—I—will—intro—duce—him—in—a—moooo—ment!"

Then came a great shouting and pounding, in the midst of which old Hoopler, rotund and smiling like a baby, walked out in the ring, waving his hat and bowing all round, till a hush fell on the audience and one might have heard a pin drop, as the veteran showman began to speak, not bellowing like Gittuppe, but with apparent ease, yet heard distinctly all over the vast building, where everybody was listening intently, as if to an oracle, to his high, shrill voice.

There was no denying the old man's power and readiness as an orator of peculiar style. Nothing disconcerted him, and he turned everything into a means of putting people into good-humor with the show, even ridiculing himself freely in an ironical style to gain his point, and talking morality in the same way he had to the programme boy, with exactly as much sincerity.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I won't say I'm not flattered by this call, because I am. Very much flattered. It is an honor to any man to be called out by such an audience as I see around me to-night."

"When I look over these rows, crowded with the beauty and fashion of this great city, and when I hear this great people, for whom I've

* Candy-butchers. Common show name for the venders of candy and fruit attached to circuses, probably on account of the profits they make and the prices they charge. Candy-butchers frequently pay large sums for their privileges, or give the show a percentage of the profits. In large cities their trade is not so lucrative as in the country districts, where they fleece the unvarying rustics on all sorts of articles, including "lives" and portraits of performers, and similar fool-traps or "fakes."

catered for fifty years, call out my name and ask me to speak to them, I feel proud—*proud!* It shows they like me and like my show. I'm glad of it. So are my partners. You've all heard me called a great humbug—the prince of humbugs. Very well, I acknowledge the corn. (Laughter.) I own I'm a humbug. (Laughter.) That's how I make my living. (Great laughter.) Make the most of it and then remember that the people like to be humbugged. (A hush.) That makes you stare; but it's so. I ask you, gentlemen, don't your wives humbug you, and don't you like it? (Laughter from ladies, gentlemen puzzled). Don't you take it all in, when your wives say: 'Why, John, it seems to me you grow younger-looking every day.' (Great laughter, gentlemen and all.) And don't you pay the spring bonnet bills after that without a squirm? (Laughter.) No, I won't say without a squirm. Maybe some of you remember about what your wife said, and think how she humbugged you. (Subdued snicker.) And you, ladies, don't you like John to tell you how well you look in that bonnet, and how he never sees a woman in the street that's able to compare with you? (Laughter from the gentlemen; ladies pouting.) And don't it go a long way toward excusing John for staying late to lodge next night, sitting up with a sick brother? (General laughter.) That's what's the matter. We all like to be humbugged a little. It pleases us all. I humbug you by pleasing you; that's all. But in this show of mine to-night I can truly say there's not a bit of humbug. It's all real, every bit of it, and I defy the whole world to show its equal. It costs us three thousand dollars a day to pay our hands alone, and you can see for yourselves whether you don't get the worth of your money. And another thing I can say: As long as I've been in the show business it has been my pride never to allow an act that would shock the most delicate lady or call up a blush on the cheek of a maiden. This is a moral show from top to bottom—a strictly temperate and virtuous concern. We don't drink, neither Mr. Gittuppe nor myself, and we don't have a drinking man in the whole show. (Applause.) And why don't we? (Hush.) Because we depend for our support on ladies and children, and we know that they abhor the intoxicating cup. (Applause.) Their pure natures revolt at the sight of intoxication, and fifty years' experience as a showman has convinced me that morality pays better than rum. (Greater applause, led by the ladies.) And now, ladies and gentlemen, I've bored you long enough. (Cries of 'Go on! Go on!') I'm an old man, and my voice ain't as strong as it used to be. Seventy-three years old last month, but strong and hearty as ever, thanks to my quitting rum and tobacco fifty years ago, and ready to-night, and, I hope, for years to come, to spend every cent I have in pleasing the public, by giving them what the people want, the best and cheapest show in the world. Ladies and gentlemen, good-evening."

And the veteran waved his hat in answer to a tempest of applause, and bowed himself out of the ring under the seats, when his whole manner changed, as he replaced his hat, and cackled, bustling about among his men:

"Well, well, well? How'd I do? How'd I do? Hey? Hey? Hey? Gittuppe, where are ye? Hey, Cola! How'd the fake go off? Guys pleased? Hey?"

"Mr. Hoopler," said Gittuppe, shaking his hand warmly, "you're a wonderful man, sir, a wonderful man. It was splendid, splendid!"

And the man meant it. They all did. If there was an honest spot in their hearts, it was that wherein dwelt admiration for old Hoopler's talent in speaking, for his fathomless cunning and selfishness, his inventive genius in advertising schemes, and his big, portly frame. They called it, in their talk to each other, "magnetism," when it was, in reality, only their own superstitious admiration for a man whose cunning plummet never sounded, whose hypocrisy shamed them by its wealth of boldness, who did things they never dared to do, and who pursued every advantage he held as remorselessly as an Eastern despot.

His speech, as a speech, was not much; but, listened to by a crowd of showmen, it was the quintessence of show business, as they understood it, the art of imposing on the public and making "the guys" believe tinsel to be gold. The little ring of virtue at the end, and the "rum and tobacco" business, were put in for effect, and every one knew it. They all knew that Hoopler had, in his day, been one of the most dissipated men in the show business, and that he had only changed his habits from policy. A great many knew that he was still a voracious sensualist, who devoured meals after the fashion of the old Roman gluttons, while his licentious life had been a proverb till age dulled his appetite and power together.

Yet they admired him at that moment, and were ready to fall down at his feet and worship him as a god, because he was such a consummately cunning master of the arts in which they believed.

"What a man that is!" said Gittuppe to Cola, as Hoopler went off down the line of the stables, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

"What a man! I don't know what we shall do when he dies."

"I know," said Cola, with a grin that showed him a deeper man than Gittuppe. "Shall I tell you?"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean you'll all be scrambling for his shoes, and the show business will be a regular slaughter-house for two or three years. The old man's name's a tower of strength while it lasts; but he's going daily. Another gorge and fever like the last will fetch him, and then, you can bet your life, Gittuppe, Cola won't be left out of the new deal."

Gittuppe eyed his partner—Cola had a share in the show—with a jealous sort of furtive scrutiny that marks the intercourse of nine showmen out of ten, each seeing in the other a possible rival for public favor; but he said, suavely:

"Of course, of course; that's business. I may be around myself, you know, about the same time."

And then strolled off, cigar in mouth, toward the ladies' dressing-room, to see one of the damsels who figured in the "Grand Equestrian Parade" at the opening of the show, known behind the scenes as "Gittuppe's Particular."

As he passed the door two muffled figures came out, and were joined by a quiet and rather plainly-dressed young man, of small stature, with eye-glasses, in whom no one would have recognized the lately daring and brilliant athlete, Pippa.

"Come, girls," he said, "I've got to go home with you to-night. The governor's busy."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SLUGGER'S FIRST BATTLE.

ON the night of Hoopler and Gittuppe's opening, a different scene took place up-town.

"I tell you he can whip his weight in wildcats. Never saw such a fighter. I've seen him hit a man three times as he was falling, and as for rough-and-tumble—why, man, he's a terror. Talk of putting up a novice against him! Well, it's no business of mine, but you'll lose your money, sure."

The speaker was a large, burly man, with a heavy jaw, dyed mustache, and sealskin overcoat, thrown open to reveal a glossy black suit, and a big solitaire diamond in a ruffled shirt-front.

He had the confident air of a man who thinks he knows what he talks about better than all the rest of the world, and is ready to back his opinion with a roll of ten-dollar bills at all times.

He was speaking to a handsome young man of fashionable appearance and quiet, fastidious manner, who answered him in a very calm voice:

"Of course, we all have a right to our opinions, judge, and the money is in Mr. Shortliffe's hands. If you want to put any more on your man, I'm ready to cover it."

The judge cast a doubtful, suspicious glance at him, as he answered, shortly:

"Much obliged; don't want to rob you—a thousand's enough, till the men come in."

They were seated on rough benches in a large bare loft, in the midst of a crowd of fashionably dressed men, smoking cigars and chatting in low tones.

They had come to see a "glove-fight," and knew it was against the law, but had cheerfully paid five dollars a ticket for the privilege of running the risk.

The "rough" element was conspicuously absent. Every one was polite to his next neighbor. We do things differently now from the old days of Hyer and Morrissey.

In the room, among the fashionable young men, were three or four determined-looking personages, mostly gray-headed, with the indefinable look of being used to having their own way, while subject to authority which they obeyed unflinchingly. The air was not quite military, but very much like it.

One of them was a powerful, handsome fellow, with a fair mustache and blue eyes. He was a police captain, known by the sobriquet of "Lightning Harris." The others were Inspectors of Police, ready to wink at the law, so long as no serious harm was done. The etiquette of the room obliged every one to call the fight a "friendly bout with the gloves" before them.

Judge Bomfelt backed Professor Ebbe, of Harlem, and Mr. Schuyler Van Beaver had discovered a novice somewhere in the city, whose prowess he thought worth five hundred dollars a side, with bets to ten times that amount, laid at pretty heavy odds.

The spectators in the secret were let in at a lower door, through a dark hall and four flights of unlighted stairs, and admitted by ticket to the privileges of a bare floor and backless pine benches, in the loft of a huge warehouse, in which bales of wool lined the sides.

In the center of the floor was marked out a "ring," or rather square, with stakes and ropes, a chair in each corner; and the spectators were beginning to grumble and stamp, when a door opened at one side of the loft, and the men who were to fight appeared in a group, preceded by a stout gentleman with a brown beard cut in English fashion, who was greeted with a low

hum of applause, instantly hushed as the spectators began to scan the figures of the fighters, each accompanied by two seconds, following Mr. Shortliffe, the referee and stakeholder.

Shortliffe was well known to every sporting-man in New York as a model referee in any sort of a contest, human or animal, and had the further distinction of being the strongest man in the world, though he did not look it in his clothes.

He made a short speech, as he passed by the ring:

"Gentlemen, I need not remind you that applause is injudicious here. Back your opinions as much as you please, but no shouting, if you don't want this fi—I mean match—stopped. Get in, men!"

Then the men entered the ring, and every eye was riveted on the Novice.

Ebbe was well known—a boxing master, who had fought in the ring twice victoriously. He was also known as an ugly rough-and-tumble fighter, who had bitten off several noses and ears, and was called a "wicked one."

He was a large, brawny man, with a bull-dog face, short mustache, and stiff, wiry black hair cut like a shoe-brush.

He was dark, with a brown skin, heavy, and savage-looking, stripped to the waist, with white silk drawers and laced canvas shoes, his muscles standing out in bold relief as he moved.

His antagonist was a very handsome, boyish-looking fellow, with short, fair curls and a clean-shaven face, mild in expression, with soft brown eyes.

His figure was the perfection of grace and symmetry, and he stood within an inch of his Herculean competitor in height, though his frame looked smooth and slender beside Ebbe's, the muscles rounded off into an Apollo-like flow, not near as imposing as the other's.

Nevertheless, old Bill Parsons (usually called Parson Bill, from his intensely clerical appearance and white choker), known as the best judge of a man in the ring to be found in America, said to his neighbor, Judge Bomfelt:

"He's a good one, judge, and don't you forget it. I'm going a hundred on the kid."

Schuyler Van Beaver smiled placidly, as he added to the judge:

"Will you put another thousand on Ebbe, now they're stripped?"

The judge looked at the men with the eye of a partisan, and replied:

"Two, if you like. Ebbe will knock out the kid in short order."

Young Van Beaver took out his book, and the two men noted the bet, while Parson Bill handed over a roll of bills to the referee they selected; and when the bets were settled, Schuyler remarked:

"Now I'll go you a hundred my man weighs the most."

"Done," said Bomfelt, eagerly. "Leave it to the referee."

"Done," retorted Schuyler, and then he rose, and said quietly: "Mr. Shortliffe, a bet is pending on the weight of the men. Have you the figures?"

"Certainly," answered Shortliffe, readily. "Ebbe, a hundred and seventy-eight. One, eighty-two is the Novice's weight."

Bomfelt said nothing, but handed over a hundred-dollar bill with a slight compression of lips and paling of face, that told his mortification, and then the referee said:

"Now, men, it's understood this is a fair fight, Queensbury rules. The man that back heels or trips, or refuses to break when I order, loses the fight. TIME!"

Then a hush fell on the room as the two gladiators walked to the scratch with small, hard-padded white kid gloves on their hands, and faced each other, warily sparring.

As they stood, Chase had his back to old Parson Bill, while Ebbe faced him, and the veteran boxer whispered to Bomfelt:

"The kid's game. Look at them darling little ears, like a bull terrier's. Ebbe's is reg'lar mule flippers. No sand in him in a hot place."*

The old sport noticed that Ebbe's ears were large and protruding, while the younger man had small delicate organs of hearing, lying close to his head.

Still the men sparred, out of distance, the old bruiser with an anxious but lowering look on his face, as if he feared to attack rashly, while the younger man wore a keen, thoughtful aspect, as if watching for a chance.

They circled each other twice to the left, Ebbe doing most of the work, till some one called out:

"Slug him, Ebbe! Knock the kid out!"

The sound distracted the boxer's attention for about half a second; and in that interval, the Novice suddenly dashed in, delivered a rattling facer that still further confused his elder, and ended with a right hand dig in the ribs that made Ebbe grunt, as his active young foe skipped back unharmed and stood on his guard again, with the same watchful, intent look as before.

"Another thousand on the Novice," said Schuyler Van Beaver, rising. "Two to one with any gentleman in the room."

* "Sand," otherwise "grit," "pluck," or "nerve."

"I'll take it, retorted Bomfelt, defiantly. "This fight isn't over yet."

And no more it seemed to be; for Ebbe after sparring a moment for wind, stung by the taunts that came from all parts of the room on "letting a kid get away with him like that," ground his teeth savagely and dashed in to the terrible half-arm "in-fighting," where it is almost impossible to guard a blow, and where give and take are the order of the day.

And here also, to the amazement of the old sports, the Novice held his own like a veteran, keeping his handsome face moving like lightning to and fro; taking what blows he could not guard on the top or side of his head, where they glanced off, and keeping his hands going like pile-drivers, in quick, short stabs, in Ebbe's face and mouth.

The room was hushed instantly, and the thuds of the gloves could be heard plainly, for nearly thirty seconds, when Ebbe suddenly broke away with a spring, and backed toward his own corner, with blood flowing from nose and mouth; his face flushed scarlet; a confused, frightened look in his eyes, and stood there panting and sparring, just as the referee called "Time!"

The Novice instantly turned and went quietly to his corner, where he leaned on the ropes, breathing deeply, but perfectly calm and collected in manner, watching Ebbe, as his seconds sponged and washed his face in the further corner.

The minute's interval was all too little for the old bruiser, his seconds being unable to stop the bleeding from his nose before he walked to the scratch again, snuffing up the blood, his lips puffed and swollen, one eye nearly closed, while the Novice's only mark was a redness on one side of his head and neck, where a glancing blow had nearly drawn blood.

In the second round—each round was limited to three minutes—Ebbe showed clearly that he was afraid of his wary and vigorous opponent, for he stood on the defensive entirely, and retreated when his foe advanced, despite the taunts hurled at him by his disappointed backers.

Judge Bomfelt ground his teeth, spit out his half-smoked cigar and growled to Parson Bill with his hands in his pockets:

"Confound the luck! I believe the kid's going to lick him after all, if there's no fluke. It's no use trying to hedge now, but I'll make up on the young one, if I live."

"Ay, ay," responded the Parson, huskily, out of a double chin and white choker, "he's a good one, that kid; if he don't give himself away to Ebbe. Ebbe ain't licked yet by a jugful, and don't you forget it."

Indeed he was not; for he kept sparring for wind nearly the whole round, and at last, when the Novice made one of his sudden lightning dashes, the old bruiser evaded it by a sudden duck of the head, and got away with a blow on the back that raised a ripple of laughter, as the referee called "Time!"

The old pugilist had escaped punishment and secured a resting-spell and sponging, while the younger man's face wore a slight frown and smile, that evinced his irritation at not having done more in the round, as he leaned back against the ropes in the corner.

In the third round the Novice walked out with a rapid step, while Ebbe's face was clean but puffy as he came to the scratch and stood his guard.

Then the younger man suddenly dashed in with a skill and force that amazed the oldest boxers in the room drove Ebbe into his corner, and closed to the same desperate "in-fighting" in which he had already shown so clearly his superiority to the older man, pinning him against the ropes, where Ebbe fought like a tiger for nearly a minute, amid intense excitement, doing his best, but getting the worst.

Then the Novice suddenly sprung back a yard or so, and, as Ebbe struggled up from the ropes, the younger man dashed his left glove in on the old boxer's face, pushing his head back for an instant, and following the blow with a right hand stab, coming up from the hip, falling on Ebbe's neck near the angle of the jaw with a dull thud.

Instantly the old prize-fighter collapsed and sunk in a heap as if he had been shot, while the Novice looked down at him with a singular, intent gaze, as if expecting what had happened, and eager to watch the effect.

That effect was obvious. Ebbe lay where he had fallen, perfectly still; and his seconds carried him to his corner, limp as a rag, while the Novice walked slowly to his own place and sat down thoughtfully, regardless of the buzzing of the spectators.

The referee stood in the ring watching the seconds of the fallen man trying to revive him, his eyes alternately turning from them to the face of his watch, till at last he closed the time-keeper and said:

"Time, men!"

The Novice rose and walked quietly to the scratch, but Ebbe still lay senseless in his corner, and one of his seconds threw up a sponge in the air, the boxer's time-honored confession of defeat, when Shortliffe said, quietly:

"Mr. Ebbe being unable to come to time, Mr. Marshall's Novice wins the match."

There was an instant buzz of eager congratulation, as the spectators broke into the ring, surrounding the victorious gladiator and shaking his hand warmly, while poor Ebbe found no one to notice him, and was carried out by his seconds to the room whence the fighters had come, still mute as a statue.

The young boxer seemed to be naturally very silent and bashful, for he was uneasy under these greetings, and his face, lately so keenly resolute, became flushed, and his eyes roamed from side to side, as if to find a familiar face.

Only, when Schuyler Van Beaver came to him, he smiled gratefully, as his backer said:

"Sam, you've done as I thought you would. Here's half my winnings on you, and I wish they were ten times as much, for your sake."

Then the young fellow flushed painfully, as he said awkwardly:

"Thank you, sir—God bless you. I hope I didn't hurt him bad, sir; but I had to do it, you know. I've no hard feelings toward him, only I had to knock him out."

Van Beaver laughed, and Judge Bomfelt came up cordially, saying:

"Young man, I've lost five thousand dollars through you to-night, but I'm not sorry. You're a wonder. Who taught you to spar like that?"

The Novice looked round toward the corner where his second, a white-headed old man, was standing waiting for him.

"There's the man, sir," he said. "He's my father—or more than father, for he taught me all I know, and made me go round to all the best men in the country till I was finished."

"Who is he?" muttered Bomfelt. "I never saw him before. He don't look like a fighter."

"He's not, sir," returned the youth quietly. "He's a stage carpenter by trade, but he learned boxing on purpose to teach me, being too old himself to do much."

"What's his name?" asked Bomfelt.

"His name's Steve Marshall," interrupted Van Beaver, a little impatiently. "Come, judge, we mustn't keep Sam in his tights so long, or he'll catch cold. I'll tell you all about Steve Marshall over a bottle at Delmonico's."

"All right," returned the old sport, as the white-headed man came up and threw a coat over Sam's shoulders as he hurried him off to the dressing-room. "He's a deceiving young fellow, Van, isn't he? What a walk he has! and there's not a fault to be found in him! Gentle as a kitten; obedient; no temper; does as he's told. Van, there's a whole pot of money in that young fellow. We'll have to give him a name; Marshall's Novice ain't enough. Say, what do you think of 'Catapult Sam'? How does that sound for a fly? Catapult Sam, hey? for he hits like a catapult. Don't he just know how to strike that fellow? It's a perfect treat to see! Five thousand dollars! Don't regret it a bit, now I've seen the man at work. He's a wonder—a regular terror. There's half a million in him, properly worked. Oh, he's just a daisy! Say, where in thunder did you drop on him, Van? Hasn't he ever fought before?"

Van Beaver laughed, as they descended the stairs, and replied:

"Never. I picked him up at my boxing-master's, where he was taking lessons. There's something queer about him and old Marshall. I don't understand it. They're both in another line of business altogether, but spend every cent they can rake and scrape to teach this young fellow fighting."

"Why, who's taught him?" asked Bomfelt.

"Who hasn't?" returned Van Beaver, as they emerged into the street. "The teachers have got so they're all afraid to see him come in with his innocent, handsome face, and pay for a set-to. Most of them refuse his money; some charge ten dollars a set-to, and earn their money hard, I tell you. He has knocked out big and little in private practice here and in Boston, Chicago and Cincinnati, as I found out by accident."

"But where does he get the money to travel?"

"Ah, that's the mystery. I can't find out. He won't tell, and the old man's mum as an oyster on the subject."

"But how came you to pick him up?"

"I tell you I saw him at old Professor Brown's, and got the old man to ask him how he'd like to enter the ring. He seemed a nice, decent fellow, almost a gentleman, and I hesitated about asking it myself. To my surprise, he said he would, if it were kept out of the papers. He said he wanted to try his nerve in a place where a man meant to hurt him. So I thought of Ebbe, who's wanted a licking ever so long, and you know the rest."

"Yes, to my cost," grunted Bomfelt. "Now, the next thing is to get that fellow into the ring, with the bare fist. If he has the sand, in him for that, he'll be worth money—heaps of it."

"He has sand enough, as you call it, to face anything," returned Schuyler, heartily. "You saw how he treated Ebbe, who's a bad man,

and has a great reputation as a wicked one. I believe he'd face any one, to the champion himself, and I think he can lick him."

Bomfelt shook his head, for he was a wary old sport.

"Don't rush things, my son," he said. "Give the gentle youth time. Try him with a little quiet fist-match in a parlor first. There's Colonel Tom Darling's dying to have one. It's time to talk of facing the champion when he's licked his man with the bare fist."

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO TRAPEZE GIRLS.

It was even o'clock in the morning at the "International Hippodrome," and the vast amphitheater of benches was bare, save for a few men sweeping and cleaning, while down by the ring a group of men, with a few ladies, were watching the rehearsal of an ambitious young man trying a bareback act.

All the glamour of lights, spangles, and a crowd was absent, and the ordinary business routine of the show went on in prosaic earnest.

The "bareback-act" youth was clad in a dirty shirt and trowsers, without any shoes, and he tried his jumps and pirouettes almost unnoticed, while the lady riders, in shabby old dresses, waited their turns and chattered scandal, and the men smoked or discussed the prospects on the road (where the show was going in a few days) principally with reference to the hotels and boarding-houses.

Reminiscences and inquiries about friends in rival shows and last season's business, alternated with comments on new acts; but the general tone was that of people who earned their money by very hard work and sympathized with each other, though jealousies of rivalry in their special lines.

In the office up-stairs sat Gittuppe and a white-headed old gentleman, with a hard, shrewd face—another of the partners, whose name never appeared on the bills, but who, nevertheless, was the real controller of the whole show, with two-thirds of the money. His name was Newgate, and he, in common with two other men, likewise in the secret partnership, went by the name of the "Flatfoots," from the soundness of their business methods and their good financial standing among other men.

Gittuppe was smoking his eternal cigar, a look of decided ill-temper on his sensual features, while Newgate was examining a letter with an inscrutable face.

"Well," said Gittuppe, crossly, "what's to be done? It will hurt us like the deuce if he dies, won't it?"

"Perhaps," was the cold answer. "His name is all we want, however, sick or well."

"But suppose he dies," said Gittuppe, "right now, at the beginning of a season?"

Newgate shrugged his shoulders.

"In that case, we should still own the show," said he. "I mean Mr. May, Abrams and myself. Your share, as you are aware, is mortgaged to us three, and we should at once buy in Mrs. Hooper's interest, for the sake of the name."

Gittuppe puffed uneasily as he growled:

"My name's worth something too. I can find people who think so. But what does the letter say? I don't believe it. It must be a kid. He was as well as ever I saw a man, last night."

Newgate spread out the letter.

"It's from his factotum, and there's no mistake. He says:

"Mr. Hooper came home last night at one o'clock, and ordered a hot supper of six quails and a sirloin steak, with three dozen oysters. This morning he's down with a relapse of his old trouble—gastric fever. The doctor won't say what he thinks, and I fear the worst." In haste. WASHINGTON MERIDEN.

You can't go back on facts, you know. We've got to face them."

Gittuppe groaned impatiently.

"Confound the luck! But he sha'n't die. We must keep it still. Suppose I go to Madison and see him, to find out?"

"He won't see you, but you can try," said Newgate coldly. "If he's as bad as Meriden says he is, there's no use in niding it. We may attract people through sympathy to hear bulletins. Telegraph down, and I'll have the messages read out in the ring."

Gittuppe's face brightened, and he looked at his watch.

"Let me see," he said; "twenty minutes to Newark, and twenty-five more to Madison. I'll get back before the night show, and can send down a message before you open the afternoon business. I'll go at once."

And he went off hurriedly, Newgate watching him with a grim smile, as if he enjoyed the other's uneasiness.

The old man put away the letter in his pocket and began to write at his desk, when a tap at the door was followed by the entrance of a finely formed young woman, well, but plainly dressed, to whom he nodded as he went on writing, saying crustily:

"Well, Maggie, what's the matter?"

The young woman had a handsome, rather French-looking face, and her voice was sweet and gentle, as she answered:

"If you please, sir; I want to talk to you about Lily."

"Well, what about her?" he asked. "No nonsense now, Maggie. You girls have to take your chances among the men, you know. It's your own lookout. You get good salaries. Of course if there's any rudeness, we stop that."

The girl's face flushed slightly, and her bosom heaved as she answered:

"There is rudeness, sir, whenever pa is away, or Harry. Lily is very young, and doesn't understand things, and some of them impose upon her and try to take liberties. She has been brought up modestly, with all pa's faults, and—"

"There, there," he interrupted crossly. "I can't enter into family histories. This is a business contract. All we ask of you two girls is be ready to do your act when you're wanted. You must take care of yourselves, outside of that. Who's been rude, and what did he do?"

"It's that Pierrelli," she said, with her eyes flashing. "He's jealous of us on his wife's account, and I believe she sets him on. This morning, at rehearsal, while I was testing the wire, Lily was insulted by him, and she boxed his ears and ran into the ladies' room, and he dared to follow her, on the pretext that his wife was in there—"

"That'll do," said Newgate sharply. "That settles it. He don't do it again. But why don't you tell Cola? He's the man. He has the charge of you?"

The girl hesitated a moment, and then said in a low, smothered voice:

"Because I heard you had daughters of your own, sir, and I thought—"

The old man's hard face hardened still more as he interrupted her:

"Business and sentiment have nothing to do with each other. My daughters are not trapeze girls. Don't bring me any more complaints. Go to Cola."

The girl flushed crimson; then turned very white; while her eyes glowed, as she said in a low voice:

"I beg your pardon, sir. I'll never do it again. Good-morning."

Then she walked out of the room and met on the rickety landing, a young, fair-faced girl, more richly dressed than herself, the same girl who had played as "Corinne" the night before.

She looked pale and angry, and burst out:

"Well, what did he say?"

"Come along and I will tell you," said Maggie in a low tone, as she went down-stairs. The other girl followed, and they went into the street, when Maggie said quietly:

"Lily, dear, I told you we had no friends. I knew he would not interfere. If you had gone in, he would have been rude to you. He won't interfere, except where the men break the rules."

"But he did break them," interrupted Lily passionately. "The little wretch ran after me into our dressing-room, and if they hadn't screamed out, I believe he'd have struck me, he was so mad. Oh, didn't I give him a good hard slap! The wretch!"

Maggie kept on walking, till the child's excitement—she was little more than a child—subsided; when she said quietly:

"Don't get angry, Lily. It's no use. I've had to go through it all. You'll get used to it in a little while. God help us! we're only two trapeze girls, as he says. We have no feelings any one's bound to respect, dear. We're not at home any more now. It's not practice, with Harry to teach us. It's work now, hard, bitter work; as you will find, dear. You thought it nice last night, with the lights, and the music, and the people applauding, and—"

"And the flowers, and the way that gentleman spoke to me," interrupted Lily eagerly, her anger dying away as she recalled her triumph of the previous evening. "It was delightful, Maggie. I forgot all about my bump in the net, in the excitement. It's such fun to go up there, with all the people staring and thinking what a terrible thing it is, when you know it don't hurt a bit unless you're clumsy. And pa was so kind too. Do you know I felt as if I could go on every night?"

Maggie smiled sadly, and pressed her little companion's arm, saying:

"Yes, dear, yes, I remember it all. I once had the same feeling. It was my first night. Not such a one as yours. Only a common tight wire, in a little French side-show. I was just seven then. I thought it was heaven when I got over my fright and heard them applauding. But that was seventeen years ago, Lily. And since then— Ah, child, it's coming! You'll find it out. This is your first lesson. It won't be your last. Hitherto no one has known who you are at the hotel; but they'll find out. You'll see, you'll see. They're all against us—"

"All but Harry and pa," interrupted Lily, eagerly.

Maggie gave her a strange, pitying look and sighed slightly, making no answer for nearly a minute, when she observed, as if thinking of something else:

"Yes, Harry's a good boy—the best I know

in the business. We must manage to get him to stay till we are ready to go home. That's the best, Lily. Don't tell him what has happened this morning; it would only worry him. Poor boy! he's not out of his apprenticeship yet, though he's as old as I am. He couldn't help us much, unless he saw Pierrelli rude. Then he'd knock him down."

"But why not tell pa?" urged Lily. "He would kill the little wretch, I'm sure he would."

Maggie shook her head sadly.

"No. You don't understand. His wife is a part of the show, and pa's a partner. She might break her contract and go to the Paris show. They want her. You know she's in a different line from us, and we shouldn't interfere with her. Even pa daren't offend her. But Newgate don't care for any of them if they break the rules. He's a hard man, but he's not unjust. He will speak to Pierrelli about breaking the rules, so we don't come into the quarrel. He's not quite as bad as the rest."

"I think they're all wretches!" cried Lily, in a tone of indignation. "Can't they leave us alone to attend to our business? I'm sure I don't want to meddle with them. That odious little wretch Pierrelli! I hate the very sight of him. And as for his wife, with her artful French ways, I despise her!"

Maggie laughed slightly.

"Very likely, but you mustn't say so before other people. Come, let's go into the hotel and have an early lunch. I've got to go on in the afternoon, you know, unless you're crazy to do it, out of your turn."

Lily shook her head saucily.

"I could if I wanted, miss; but I give you a chance to get the bouquets."

Maggie smiled and sighed as they went into the hotel, answering the younger girl:

"Ah, yes, dear! The flowers are sweet, but you'll soon find there's a thorn under every one."

Then they went in and disappeared. As they did so two men lounging in a neighboring doorway, came out on the sidewalk, and one of them said:

"That's the pair. It must be the little one; the other's too old."

He was an old man, with a white head and mustache, shabbily dressed, and accompanied by a tall, dark young fellow, clad in workman's costume. They went off down the street toward the International Hippodrome, and the young man said, in a low tone:

"Do you think he'll know you again?"

The old man shook his head.

"It ain't possible. He went away to England after he slugged me, and I've been out of his sight ever since. He may remember the names though. A man ain't apt to forget a thing like that. We must change 'em. My name's Stevens, yours is Samuels, when we go in to Newgate. You're my nevy, you know."

The young man nodded.

"All right. You do the talking. It's so long since I was in the business, I've clean forgotten it."

"But you hain't forgotten him?" said the older man, with a singular look.

The young man's eyes glowed as he answered:

"I remember him anywhere, till the time comes to pay him off. Then—! You know."

The old man nodded, like one well pleased. He had a shrewd, sensible face; was very quiet in manner; and the only thing remarkable about him was a certain habitual setting of the lower jaw, and a way of carrying his hands, half clinched, by his side, at all times. The young man had the same habit, though not one in a thousand would have noticed either that or the quick, roving glances he cast round him as he walked.

They went up the rickety staircase to Mr. Newgate's office, and were told to come in by the gruff old financier, who eyed them in a hostile manner till Stevens handed him a letter, which changed his looks materially; for it came from a very rich man, whom Newgate knew.

"Well," he said more affably, "what do you gentlemen want? Passes?"

Stevens smiled grimly.

"No, sir. We ain't in the paper line. I'm an old hand at stage-carpentering, and my nevy here, Charley Samuels, will make a good canvas-man. That's all we want jest now, if you ain't full fur the road already."

Newgate eyed them critically, saying:

"You're too old to do any hard work. Are you used to setting platforms and seats?"

"Used to be head man in the Van Amburgh show on the road," returned Stevens promptly. "Never had but one accident, and that was when a tent blew down."

"Very well," said Newgate, scribbling on a piece of paper. "Take that to Mr. Roper at the other door, and he'll put you on. The young man, what's his name?"

"Samuels, sir," responded the youth himself.

"Yes, Samuels. Well, Samuels, do you know anything about ropes and tackles, rigging wires and horizontal bars, and so on?"

The question was a simple one, yet, to the old man's surprise, Samuels turned white, and hesitated some seconds, ere saying:

"Yes, sir; but—it's all the same to you, I'd rather not be in that line, if you want a man there."

Newgate bent his bushy brows.

"Why not? What do you mean?"

Stevens interrupted eagerly.

"No harm, sir. He lost a relative once by an accident."

"So much the better," returned Newgate coldly.

"So much the better for us. He'll be likely to be careful, knowing the danger. I've no vacancy among the canvas men; but I want a good, careful hand, to stretch Corinne's wires, and attend to the catapult on the road. Do you know Mr. Cola?"

Again the question was a simple one, but Samuels hesitated ere he answered:

"Only by—reputation, sir. Am I to go under him? Is it for him I work?"

"No. You work for the show. All you get from him will be instructions how to fix the wires, first time. After that you are responsible for accidents. I'll try you for a week. If you do well I'll pay you fifteen dollars a week, and that's very high pay. Take this to Mr. Cola. You'll find him at rehearsal, I guess. Good-day."

He turned to his work as the two strangers went down-stairs, and Stevens remarked:

"I told you old Van Beaver's letter would fetch him. They're bedfellows in politics, and that goes a great ways; and they're in the same bank, and that's more. But I didn't expect things would turn out this way."

"No more did I," returned Samuels, in a low tone.

"I don't think I would have gone in there had I known what was coming. It's going to be a hard trial to me."

"No more nor you can stand, boy," replied Stevens, confidently. "I hasn't trained you for nothing, all these twenty year, to keep your temper and bide your time. There's only one thing I'm afeared of."

"And what's that?" asked Samuels, curiously.

"That he'll know ye. You're almighty like! Almighty like! All but the eyes! Them's yer am's, I reckon."

"I don't know," returned the other, with a slight sigh; "I don't remember her, Steve."

"I wish I know'd what became of her," the old man muttered. "I've alders suspected there was—"

He broke off at the door of the building, as Cola, handsome and rich in dress, with a seal-skin overcoat, thrown open to show his diamonds, walked past them in the doorway, and they followed him into the group near the rehearsal ring, after showing their passes from Newgate to the vigilant gate-keeper.

"And now," said Stevens to Samuels, "there he is. Tackle him, and I'll watch if he knows you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW HANDS AT THE SHOW.

MR. COLA was standing by the ring chatting with a little dapper personage, daintily dressed, who dropped his aspirates with a Cockney twang, and acted as ring-master under the name of Signor Pierrelli, when he was touched on the shoulder, and behold a tall, dark young man in working dress, with two or three smudges of black on his face and very black hands, one of which held a slip of paper.

The young man said, politely, but in an awkward manner:

"You're Mr. Cola, ain't you?"

Cola stared at him, and his handsome face whitened perceptibly. The usual bland, insinuating smile left it, and he took on a hard, evil look, as he answered:

"Well, what of it? What do you want?"

"Mr. Newgate gave me this for you, sir," said the young man, taking off his hat in a respectful manner, but standing upright, with a pair of penetrating brown eyes fixed on Cola. "Said you wanted a hand on rigging wires and such."

Cola flashed a swift glance over him, and bit his lips, as he took the paper, the perusal of which seemed to relieve him considerably, for he uttered a little sigh and his face cleared, as he answered:

"Yes, yes, certainly. I thought—never mind. Your name's Samuels, I see. Yes, I want a hand. My best man's gone off on a tear, and I can't trust him. Do you drink?"

"Yes, sir," responded the young man, quietly, "whenever I feel thirsty."

Cola laughed, and looked still more relieved, though he kept casting furtive glances over the young man's figure, as he said:

"I mean do you get drunk?"

"No, sir; I can't afford it," was the reply.

"Very good. Well, what do you know about business? Ever rigged tight wires? Do you understand the catapult act?"

"Yes, sir."

"Indeed! Where have you seen it?"

"In London, sir. I was canvas man in the Paris Show, and served a month with Mr. Giulini."

Cola frowned slightly, for Giulini was a business rival, who stole his ideas, but he was too

much of a showman to hesitate about taking a man from the enemy, so he said briskly to Samuels:

"Well, I'll give you a trial. Come over and take a look at the rigging, and let's see if you can manage the catapult."

He led the way to where the machine lay, and Samuels followed him, eying his back as he walked, with a singular, hungry, intent gaze, very different from the innocent air with which he had faced Cola.

Stevens, in the mean time, had presented his paper to the boss carpenter, who was at work on some benches, and he kept watching Cola, even while he was talking to Roper.

He saw young Samuels and the manager wind up the springs of the machine, and heard Samuels say:

"Better try it with a test bag, sir. Them springs varies with the weather."

"Put her on, then," said Cola in his deep sonorous tones, and Samuels took a large sack that seemed to be full of sand, and laid it on the cushions of the catapult.

"Ready!" cried Cola, and every one looked that way, to see Samuels, mallet in hand, standing by the catch of the catapult.

"Ready!" answered Samuels.

"Go!" shouted Cola.

The mallet fell, the catapult leaped up with a clang, followed by a crashing of glass, as the hundred and thirty pound bag was flung through the skylight of the lofty building, and fell on the roof outside, amid a derisive laugh from the show people round, as the shivered glass came down.

"Well, governor, what are you trying to do?" asked a quiet voice, as little Harry Cola, the "Pippa" of the bills, came strolling up with his glasses on his nose. "Do you want to kill me to-night?"

Cola was rather pale, and looked very angry, as he growled, half to himself:

"Some one does. Confound their jealous hearts. Can't they let a man earn a living?"

"It's lucky we tested the thing, sir," said Samuels respectfully. "The young man might have been sent to kingdom come, if he'd been on it. Some one's screwed up the tension too tight."

Cola examined the machine, cursing under his breath, and said to his son:

"Lucky this man came in. Don't you ever go on the cushions again, till the springs have been tested, and you know it's right."

The young man smiled tranquilly.

"I'm not likely to, governor. I can assure you that I appreciate the fact that I take my life into my hand, twice a day. Is this the new man, to take Job Stalker's place?"

"Yes," said Cola rather stiffly. "I'm taking him on trial. I shall have to attend to things myself, I suppose, hereafter, till I know if I can trust him."

Harry eyed Samuels critically, observing:

"Govern'r, you're no judge of human nature. I never liked Job and you thought him a perfect treasure. I tell you Samuels is all right. I'll trust my life with him all the time. He has an honest look, I never mistook."

Samuels looked at him with a strange sort of expression as he spoke, but said nothing, as Cola observed:

"All right, Harry, if you like him, he can go on. But you're my son, and I tell you it's a hard thing to me to have to expose you as I do."

Harry laughed a little sarcastically.

"The cash comes in very welcome though:—don't it, governor? You'd have to look a long time outside of your own family to find such a paying trio as the girls and myself. Nerve is worth money."

Cola smiled proudly as he patted the boy on the shoulder, saying:

"We've made it so, Harry, haven't we? Well, fix up things to suit yourself. This young man is on trial for a week. Look to Maggie's wire. Some of those horse people are as jealous of the girls as so many Turks. I keep sweet with them; but—you look to the wire."

He strolled off, leaving the two young men together over the catapult. There was a great contrast between them, though both were nearly of an age. Samuels was tall and clumsy-looking in his clouthy clothes; Harry Cola small and active, beautifully and compactly built, with a handsome face, slender, downy, blonde mustache, and blue eyes that seemed to be short-sighted, for they were always assisted by glasses.

He seemed to be a pleasant, hearty boy, frank and open, and spoke kindly and familiarly to Samuels, as they arranged the catapult for the afternoon's performance, and tested the stays that kept the wire on which Corinne walked when she made her "eagle swoop."

Young Cola even kicked off his boots and made an ascent of the wire to test it, dropping into the net below with an unconcern that showed the difference between men and women, and caused Samuels to say, respectfully:

"You're a plucky one, sir. I wouldn't like to do that as you do."

Harry Cola laughed, as he scrambled out of the net, saying:

"That's nothing, Samuels. Only a clever fake for the girls, you know. You're to be here this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then look to the rigging, the last thing, before the show opens. One of my sisters is to go on—the oldest—and she knows her business very well; but one can't be too careful. Girls can't be depended on at all times, you know. Keep under the wire with the other man. You seem to be a strong fellow."

Samuels nodded.

"Pretty strong, sir. Am I to catch her if she falls?"

Harry laughed.

"She won't fall; and, if she did, I don't want to be under. Maggie's a pretty stout girl. But it gives them confidence sometimes. Remember I'm going to have you for head rigger, and our lives will depend on you. You look careful and prudent."

"Mr. Cola," said Samuels, quietly, "one thing you can depend on. No accident shall come to you or your sisters while I'm below. You mayn't believe it, but I think I could catch you, if you fell out of the net."

Harry laughed again in his usual quietless manner.

"No fear of that. The governor has taught us caution, you may be sure. The girls know that as well as I do. Well, I'm going now. See you at the show. Be here at the opening."

Then he put on his boots and walked off, buming an air in his light-hearted way, and Samuels stifled a heavy sigh as he looked after him, murmuring:

"Ah, if you were not his son, I could like you very much."

The laborers round the show brought in the test-bag from the roof soon after, and he tried the catapult three times, till the bag dropped exactly in the center of the net, before he went in search of his friend, whom he found working by Roper, in the most amicable frame of mind, but ready to break off for dinner.

As they went away together, Stephens said:

"The skunk knew your face at the first look; but you fooled him afterward. Are you on for good?"

"On trial for a week; but I shall stay. The young man likes me, I think. He's a good fellow. I felt mean when he talked to me, to think what we mean to do."

Old Stevens set his mouth in its usual grim fashion, as he answered:

"All we mean to do, boy, is justice on him. He ruined you and me, cost me a year's doctor's bills, and nigh killed me, while I know he killed some one else. There ain't an honest hair on him. If he knowed who we are he'd take a chance to kill us on the sly. We've got to hold our own and keep dark with him and all the rest."

Here they were interrupted by one of the men, a burly giant, as they passed through the menagerie on their way out.

"Here, you two! What in thunder are you going this way out for! This ain't the door for you. Git up and dust."

He advanced threateningly toward them, and Stevens, putting on an appearance of terror, took hold of Samuels and hurried him off, saying audibly:

"Run, boy, run. That's Fighting Frank Frisbie. He'll knock spots out of us."

Fighting Frank Frisbie smiled complacently, as he roared after them:

"You better run, you galoots, or I'll wipe the floor with the pair of ye."

Stevens heard him and smiled in his grim way, as he hurried on, saying under his breath:

"Keep yer temper, lad, keep it. We'll have to give him a prop, some day; but it ain't tim yet. You've got to let 'em pick on ye, till they very supes tries on their gags. We two can afford to let 'em know what we know, jest. Wait till the end of the season, and grit teeth and bear it."

Samuels nodded his head as they went to the street, observing quietly:

"I don't mind it. Those fellows do, further."

"Heard of him. He's a terror animal man, and they gave him the. I don't think he's much good, myself. Are you going to do if he tries to you?"

Samuels compressed his lips.

"I don't know yet. He's a big man, and he may turn up."

They turned down a lodging-house, where the man found a letter under his coat, and he opened and read, with the remains,

"Can't do it now, tempting offer. Act with him, down him easy, be done now."

Samuels fully in his pocket, with a thousand dollars, and he said:

"I don't know, but I'll do it."

"The

see he says it's to be in a parlor. We can slip off then, and that's the only time we can."

"But suppose you get marked," responded the old man, cautiously. "You can't hide a peeper in mourning."

Samuels smiled confidently.

"I'll risk that," he said. "If he gets in so I can't hide it, why it's only to let that big calf in the stables think he did it, and yell like a good one."

Stevens smote his knee as one well pleased.

"The very thing. Boy, I'll risk it, and make it next Sunday, if you think you'll be ready."

Samuels handed him the letter.

"I'm ready any time," he said, laconically. "You can make the arrangements for me. Where's this Colonel Darling's house?"

"Up in Westchester. I've heard of it. He's got a parlor, sixty by thirty; and he's been talking about this thing ever so long."

"And if I win," said Samuels, thoughtfully, "it will make twenty—"

"Hush!" interrupted Stevens, cautiously. "Not here, not here. We've got to move out of this soon. It's too near the show. Let's go round and get dinner now, and send word to the judge on the way to the show."

They went out and stopped on the way at a hotel, where they wrote and dispatched a letter not without exciting some comment and sarcasm on account of their shabby dress.

Samuels wrote the letter rapidly in a bold, neat hand, and addressed it to:

HON. GIDEON J. BOMFELT,

488 West 49th St."

He mollified the ire of the clerk at the desk by paying two cents for the privilege of using the hotel paper, bought a stamp, and mailed the letter at the nearest lamp-post.

That done, the two friends went to dinner; and about an hour after, took their way to the International Hippodrome, just before the doors opened.

The door-keeper at the ring entrance scowled at them, and said in a surly way:

"You fellers'll get fined if you come so late another time. You're wanted afore two. We ain't no Grand Moguls in here."

Stevens smiled, and replied good-humoredly:

"It's our first day, you know. We'll not be late any more. I'm sorry."

The door-keeper seemed to be mollified, and they went to their work just as the doors opened and the crowd rushed in.

Pretty soon the performers began to arrive, muffled up in cloaks and ulsters, reserved and inclined to be cross, like people going to work at distasteful employment.

Samuels looked to the fastenings of the wire at once, strained on the guy-wires, examined the springs of the catapult, and went to look at the nets into which the performers were to fall, to see if any of the India-rubber bands on which they hung were likely to slip or give way.

He was retying a knot, which looked a little hazardous, when he heard Cola's voice close behind him, saying blandly:

"That's right, Samuels. You seem to understand your business, and to be a careful man."

"I hope so, sir," returned the young man, in his quiet, rather bashful way.

"By the by," continued Cola, eying him keenly, "haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

"Very like, sir," returned Samuels.

"Yes, but where—where?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir."

went on tying the knot in such a quiet, unobtrusive manner, as if indifferent to the question. Cola turned away and sauntered off, whirling round again suddenly and looking at him.

Young man was still placidly testing and the manager's suspicions were still unshaken: for he went away for good.

furtive smile curved the lip of the young man, but not where you're

to wait his stand in the wonderful variety of cotton velvets and silks of the "World's Greatest, Colossal Show."

acted, with distinguished; others bombing over most

act, with distinguished; others bombing over most

you can't. I guess you never saw her."

"Saw who?" asked Stevens, with a delightful

scorn of grammar.

mares, with an educated mule for assistant ring-master; saw Madame, his wife, successfully straddle four horses, without coming in two pieces; and was roused from his reverie by Cola shouting, in his deep bass voice:

"The peerlessly beautiful and unequalled CORINNE will now be fired from the eighty-ton gun, and execute the eagle swoop!"

CHAPTER X.

A VERY CLUMSY MAN.

SAMUELS started from his reverie and went to his post under the wire with another man, as a tall, grandly-formed woman, who looked like a living statue of Venus in her white and gold tights, came out of the dressing-room and tripped to the wire.

She was taller than the Corinne of the previous night; but so perfect was the make-up, that not one in the audience suspected but what it was the same girl.

Cola led her forward to the center of the ring, where she smiled and bowed to the audience; then ran to the wire ladder, light as a gazelle, and tripped up the rounds to the huge cannon slung in the air, from which she was to be "fired," as the bills ran.

Samuels knew the act very well, and had but little apprehension as to the result; for he saw that the girl understood her business thoroughly. The cannon act was duly performed amid thunders of applause, and then followed the "eagle swoop," a feat of real daring, which hushed the house at first, and then caused it to break into raptures.

When it was over the young man had the first close view of the girl's features, as he helped her out of the net, and his face turned pale as she went away, after thanking him with a sweet smile.

"By heavens!" he murmured to himself. "It is very like, very like! If I could only find the scar, I should be sure of it. Oh, is it possible? No, it cannot be. I'm a fool. I'm dreaming."

He had no time for any dreaming, either; for, at that moment, Madame Turner dashed into the ring on her vicious thoroughbred to do the haute ecole act, and he had to get out of the way in quick time.

A circus is no place for dreaming, except in the reserved seats.

He went to his post at the catapult and waited till Pippa's turn came, when he met Cola again, face to face, and noticed that the suave manager was cross and snappish, and cursed him several times about his "clumsiness," to which he made no reply till the boy Pippa had executed his really fearful flight.

Then he said to Cola, humbly:

"Please, sir, I beg pardon. It's my first time. I'll do better this evening."

"You'd better," answered Cola, shortly, "or you'll get a ticket to leave this show in mighty short order. You can go now. Be here in the evening, half an hour before the doors open, and don't go mooning about Maggie, or I'll break your head for you."

He spoke threateningly, and Samuels shrank back as if he feared a blow, when Cola smiled sarcastically, observing:

"No, you needn't be afraid. I won't hit you as long as you attend to your own affairs; but if ever I do strike, you'll remember it. I've killed men with my fist before now."

He sauntered off, while Samuels went in the opposite direction, a dubious smile on his face over his set teeth, muttering:

"He'll face it, I think; he'll face it. But I must see those girls somehow."

He went out of the show and mingled with the usual crowd of starers at the posters, keeping a furtive watch on the door, till he saw the women come out, one a little taller than the other.

He sauntered out of the crowd, with his hands in his pockets, toward the hotel where the two girls boarded, and allowed them to pass him. As they did so, the taller gave him a kind nod, and said to the other:

"That's the new rigger, Lily. I never had the wire so well stretched before, and Harry says he's a treasure at the catapult."

Then the younger one cast a long look at him, and spoke to him with all frank unconcern of a child:

"I say, what's your name?"

"Samuels, miss," he answered.

"Well," she said, "I hope you'll attend to me as well as to my sister. I'm going on to-morrow."

"I'll try to, miss," returned Samuels, quietly, and then they walked on while he muttered to himself as soon as they were out of hearing:

"Fool that I am to trouble so. It's impossible it can be she. Yet, I could only see the scar, I could be certain. I heard him call her Maggie, too. But there are hundreds of Maggies in the world."

He went on to his boarding-house, and was joined there, about an hour after, by Stevens, to whom he said as soon as the old man entered the room:

"Steve, do you remember?—no you don't—you can't. I guess you never saw her."

"Saw who?" asked Stevens, with a delightful

"The girl that plays the cannon act. Her name's Maggie, and she's the very born image of little Maggie South that used to travel with us in the French circuit, when I was a child."

Stevens shook his head dubiously.

"Can't be the same. You couldn't know her. Why, you're twenty-six, and you couldn't have been more'n five then."

"I remember it as distinctly as yesterday. It was my only happy time," returned Samuels, earnestly. "Father was well, and treated us well, and Maggie and I were training together. She was a year younger than I, and we used to quarrel and make up. One day, in a quarrel, I pushed her off the wire, and she cut her forehead on a piece of a broken tea-cup, so I thought I'd killed her. I was so scared we never had another quarrel. If this girl's the same Maggie, she's got a little crescent-shaped scar on the left side of her forehead, under her hair. You can't see it now for the bangs; but I've got to find out somehow."

"Why?" asked Stevens.

Samuels frowned impatiently.

"You ought to remember."

"I don't, lad."

"Well, I'll tell you. If my mother wasn't dead when father was killed, Maggie South was with her, and can tell me where she is, or was."

Stevens looked interested.

"That's sartin, boy. But how are we to find out? We ain't expected to speak to the performers, you know. These show folks is awful high and mighty."

"I must take my chances of it. These two girls are different from the rest, especially the little one. I judge she's new to the ring. She's innocent. Spoke to me as if she had known me all the time."

"She won't keep that long," said the old man, grimly. "A few weeks will rub that out of her, and she'll come down like the rest."

"I don't know. It's no business of mine," returned Samuels, indifferently. "I don't care about her, any way. They say she's Cola's daughter, and Harry calls them both his sisters."

"That makes nothing. That's show talk. The boy's his, I reckon; but them gals is only 'prentices. I'll bet on it. Lord, boy, don't ye think I watch 'em! I've a better chance nor you. They wanted a job done in the ladies' room, and Roper sent me in, 'cause I was the oldest, I guess. I seen 'em both, and heerd 'em talkin'. They ain't no relation to Cola, and I'll bet on it."

"Did they notice you?"

"Not they. I'll say that for 'em; they're both good, modest gals, and didn't offer to do what some of the rest did. Them French gals is worst of the lot."

"Did you see Cola?"

"Lord, yes. He's taken quite a shine to me; don't know me from Adam. I was nigh bu'stin' out laffin' to think on it. White hair and wrinkles changes a man powerful, Sammy, and don't you forget it."

"Well, you try and find out whether that girl Maggie has a scar under her hair, a little crescent, at the edge of the forehead!"

"I'll do it, boy, somehow. But, s'posin' it be the same? What then?"

"If it's Maggie South, I'll trust her with my life," said Samuels earnestly. "She never told how she was hurt that time. Swore she did it herself, just to save me a whipping. Ah, poor Mag, poor Mag, she was a good girl."

"Mebbe she hasn't grown up so well," said Stevens cautiously. "Show business ain't the best thing in the world for gals. They gets to takin' bad of one another, and you can't trust 'em, all times."

"That may be true, but I won't believe it of Mag," said Samuels obstinately. "But we'll find out in good time. Anything new?"

"Old Hooper's down sick; ain't expected to live," returned Stevens. "It was read out in the ring at the close of the show, a telegram from Gittuppe at Madison. Doctors don't give much hopes, if he don't get better afore tomorrow mornin'."

"Well, that won't affect us."

"It may, boy. This here Cola, he's notbin' but a side-partner now; but if the old man dies, there's like to be a new deal all round, I reckon. We might get the sack."

"Well, we won't borrow trouble, Steve. We've got work to do, and it must be done. I'm not clear yet how to punish him; but he shall be punished somehow. Let's go to dinner. Have you looked for a new place?"

"Yes. I've found one near by, where we can go out in working-clothes by a back door, and no one will know we work in the show—not even the people in the house. I've told him we're in a boiler factory at high wages, and pay in advance. They'll watch us for a day or two, and then it'll be all sweet."

They went off to a cheap restaurant, and thence to the evening show, where no specially exciting incident occurred, save that Samuels exchanged a few words with Maggie as he helped her out of the net at the end of her performance, Cola having gone to the office.

"Ain't your name Maggie South?" the young helper asked in a smothered tone, as he took her hand.

She turned her head quickly to look at him and answered, as if startled:

"What business—What do you mean?"

"No offense, miss," he muttered, with his head averted, as he assisted her to her feet.

"Beg pardon, I'm sure."

The girl, used to defending herself against all comers, and suspicious of mankind, made him no answer, but a cold, haughty look, and turned away to her dressing-room. Samuels went on with his duties in the same dogged, impassive way he always affected, till Harry Cola came on for his catapult act, with his father, as usual, to superintend it.

This time Cola did not scold; but left Samuels entirely alone, and watched him keenly at his work. When it was over, he said placably:

"You did very well, young man. In a few days, I may be able to trust you alone."

Samuels bowed his head awkwardly.

"Thank ye, sir. Much obliged. I try my best."

He saw, out of the corner of his eye, the two girls at the door of the dressing-room, as if they were waiting to go home, and saw one of them signal to Cola, who shook his head with an impatient frown, saying:

"No, no; of course not. I can't take you home. I've other things to do. Wait for Harry."

"But Harry's got other things to do, too," said Lily, with a childish pout, "and we have to wait, and wait, and wait, you cross old pa! Send some one home with us."

She seemed to be something of a spoiled child, and Cola seemed to be fond of her too, for he laughed and said:

"Well, Lily, take some one, any one. Here, Samuels, you just see these young ladies to the Beechgrove Hotel. You needn't come back to-night."

Lily pouted as she looked at the shabby working clothes of the dark young man, who replied bashfully:

"Yes, sir, if the young ladies don't object to my rough looks—"

"You do what I tell you," retorted Cola in his harshest tone. "Who cares about your looks in the dark? You don't want to offer your arm, confound you! Just follow them, and see no one gives 'em any impudence. That's all you have to do."

"Very good, sir," said Samuels humbly, "and if any one's impudent, what am I to do, sir?"

"Knock him down of course. What sort of a man are you anyway? Can't you fight?"

"I don't know, sir," returned Samuels still more humbly. "I never tried. Mother told me it was wicked, sir."

Cola looked at him a moment in a puzzled sort of way, and then burst out laughing, saying hastily:

"There, girls, get along. Samuels will see no harm comes to you."

The girls had listened to the colloquy with surprise, and Lily whispered to her sister:

"What a great calf he is. Come on."

Then they went out, and Samuels followed them, slouching along, with his shoulders rounded, about a yard in rear of the pair, and looking everywhere but at them, as it appeared.

So they went about two blocks, till they came to a gaslighted row of shops, and a fashionably dressed young man raised his hat to the girls, saying affably.

"Why, good-evening, young ladies. Charmed to see you, Miss Brown. Why, if it isn't my own Mary Ann. Come, let's have some ice-cream at Delmonico's."

As he spoke, he turned to walk beside them and Maggie said angrily:

"Go away, sir. We don't know you."

Lily clung to her sister's arm and said:

"Run, run, Maggie! Oh! the wretch!"

They quickened their pace, and the slouching Samuels did the same with one or two huge strides, not appearing to notice anything going on, his hands in his pockets, till he was beside the impudent young man, who kept on talking and trying to follow up the girls.

Then the two heard a sudden gurgle behind them, as if some one was choking, followed by a bump on the pavement.

Maggie looked back, and saw Samuels still slouching behind them, while the impudent young man lay on the broad of his back on the flags, his hat in the gutter, his cane up by one of the store fronts, while he was groaning dimly.

"Go on! go on!" muttered the slouching man, in a different tone from what he had yet used, stern and menacing. "Go on, girls. You don't want to be recognized. I'll take care of you. Walk fast."

They took the hint, and he slouched after them, his hands still in his pockets, while they almost ran to the door of the hotel and were going in, when Maggie turned round and said, in her sweetest tones:

"Thank you, sir. I am very much obliged to you. I beg your pardon for my rude answer in the show. You are right."

Lily stared at her as if wondering what she meant; but Maggie took her arm.

"Come Lily," she said, "we must go in."

Then they vanished into the house, and

Samuels slouched back to the other side of the street, where he saw a little crowd gathered near the lighted stores.

As he came up, the dapper young man, who had suffered such a mysterious fall, was standing telling a policeman what had happened. His face was white and he looked stupid, while his back was covered with dried mud and his hat was on the back of his head, all crushed, muddy and battered.

"I don't know how it happened," said the late dapper young man. "I was walking down the avenue quietly, when a man went past me, stuck his elbow into my throat, and I felt my foot caught in something. I went down on the back of my head, and when I came to, these gentlemen were asking me what was the matter."

"Reckon you'd better go home," said the policeman, gruffly. "You've been a crookin' your little finger too much; that's what's the matter with you."

"I haven't drunk a drop to-day, so help—" began the young man, when the gentleman with the club interrupted:

"There, that'll do. You've bin arter some gal, you have, and her feller's give you the back heel. What sort of a man was it?"

"I don't know. I didn't see. I never follow girls," asseverated the young man, a denial which elicited a laugh, as a man said:

"The cop's right. I seen him arter two gals, and he was served jest right; only the man orter have slugged him in the jaw."

Then the group broke up, and Samuels slouched off, with his hands still in his pockets, muttering:

"Lucky those stones were hard. They just stunned him enough. Now, how shall I get the girls to keep dark about this? Ah, there's my man."

He saw Harry Cola coming along to the hotel, and accosted him respectfully:

"Please, Mr. Harry."

"Well, Samuels, what is it? Short of money?" said the young man, kindly, his hand going to his pocket instantly.

Samuels made a gesture of dissent.

"No, sir, no. For God's sake, don't call me a striker. I'm not. No, sir; the fact is, your father told me to see the ladies home, and I followed, so people wouldn't think I belonged to them. Miss Lily looked as if she didn't like the idea of bein' see'd home by a rough feller like me."

"Lily's a little fool," said Harry, sharply. "I shall tell her so. Is that it?"

"No, sir, please don't. It ain't that. But a jackadandy fuddled the ladies, and I give him a little push into the gutter, and he slipped and got muddied, you know, and—"

"You did right. Thank you. I'll tell my father," said Harry, heartily. "I'm only sorry you didn't hit him hard."

"Please, sir," said Samuels, earnestly, "don't tell no one, and beg the ladies not to tell anybody at all. It was an accident. He was drunk. If they tell, it'll get over the show, and they'll call me a fighter, and I ain't no fighter, sir. And that Frisbie, he'll be picking a muss with me. Please, sir, don't say a word about it."

Harry looked doubtfully at him, saying:

"Samuels, I'm ashamed of you. You're big enough to eat up Frisbie. He's only a bag of wind. I hope you're not afraid of him."

"Indeed, I am, sir," said Samuels, humbly. "I can't help it, sir. I was born so. I never could fight. Mother told me I mustn't."

Harry burst out laughing.

"Oh, nonsense, humbug. Well, I won't tell any one, and I'll get the girls to keep quiet about it. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

And Harry went off one way, while the relieved Samuels slouched another, till he came on the dilapidated young man he had so suddenly overthrown in a side-street, walking home slowly, and reeling as he went.

The big fellow went to him at once and said, kindly enough:

"Come, sir, you seem to be sick. Let me help you home."

The young man seemed to be grateful to him for he said, clinging to his arm:

"Thank you—thanks! My head's so dizzy; I got a fall—a bad one; served me right, too—no business. Good lesson. I live in the next block."

Samuels helped him along tenderly, till they met a policeman, who eyed the pair suspiciously, till Samuels said:

"This gentleman's sick; had a fall. I'm helping him home. My name's Samuels, and I run the catapult at the International Hippodrome. Take the other side, please."

The policeman tucked his club under his arm and accompanied them in silence to the middle of the next block, when they helped the dilapidated young man into his house, and Samuels was going away, when the policeman said:

"Stop a bit! Have you lost any money, sir? You halt, young man, till he sees."

But the dilapidated youth had lost nothing, and the guardian of the night reluctantly dismissed Samuels, observing menacingly:

"I'll let you off this time, but don't you go to pickin' up folks no more. I've a mind to run you in now, as a suspicious case."

"Well, why don't you do it?" responded Samuels quietly. "I've told you who I am, and where I work. I'm ready to be run in."

"Well, I'll let you off this time," was the sage response, and the policeman walked off.

Samuels slouched after him to the corner, and thence into the more frequented streets, where he passed nearly half an hour in walking at a rapid pace, as if desirous of getting as much exercise as possible, before he returned to his own lodging, where he met Steve, who said to him:

"The match is made. You're to meet on Sunday, at Colonel Tom's. No gloves."

CHAPTER XI.

FIGHTING FRANK FRISBIE.

MR. COLA was enjoying a cigar in the office on the Saturday evening of the first week of the show, and his face wore a look of serene satisfaction.

Mr. Gittuppe was there also, puffing volumes of smoke, and Mr. Newgate, grim and taciturn, was conning over some accounts.

At last he looked up, and said:

"Well, gentlemen, the business has been good. To-night's receipts foot up best of all, and the show has taken in thirty-eight thousand dollars for the week."

Cola smiled. Gittuppe looked like a prime pig after a full meal, and even Newgate's features relaxed as he added:

"It's a good beginning. I must go down and pay off now. What are you going to do tomorrow, Cola?"

Cola puffed a volume of smoke.

"Going to a little party—notting in our line; but we may have it in as a feature at some time or other. Judge Bomfelt has asked me; and an old friend of yours—Van Beaver—is interested."

Newgate gave a grunt.

"Fight—I'll bet a dollar! Van was always given to that sort of thing. Don't see any fun in it myself. We don't want any Mace and Coburn business in our show. Ladies don't like it. Won't have it, Cola."

Cola colored slightly, as he said:

"Didn't say anything about having it here! Don't be too previous, Newgate. Maybe I'll see you there."

Newgate rose and went to the door, without answering; then turned, and observed:

"You'll lose your money, Cola. You're on the wrong man."

Both Cola and Gittuppe laughed as the grim old man went down-stairs, and Gittuppe said:

"Keen hand, old Newgate. Bet he'll be there! Can't you get a fellow a ticket?"

"It depends on the fellow. It's a very close affair—I think not."

"Where is it?"

"I'm not at liberty to say."

And Cola departed to the down-stairs office, where he found the men waiting in line to be paid as fast as they could sign the roll. At the end of the line stood the two new men, and Cola heard Newgate say to Samuels as he came to the window:

"Ten dollars. If Mr. Cola reports favorably, it will be twelve next week. Sign here."

"Thank you sir," said Samuels, humbly, and he signed his name in an awkward, shaky hand and tucked his money into his pocket as he walked away.

Cola saw a group of the animal men near by, watching him, and saw that they were whispering together maliciously as Samuels slouched off toward the exit in the now darkened building.

The manager frowned slightly and made a step as if to follow, but checked himself, with the muttered remark:

"He must take care of himself. The great calf. He's big enough to eat them all up."

"Who is?" asked Harry Cola, who was standing by.

"That lout, Samuels. I judge Frisbie's set the boys to guying him. Yet, they're following him. Wouldn't wonder if they get his money."

Harry Cola started.

"What an infernal shame! A harmless, quiet fellow like that. Let's go after and stop them."

"No business of mine," answered Cola, with a shrug. "If the calf won't fight, he can bawl, I suppose."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when they heard a scuffle in the dark entranceway, and a loud cry of "Help! help! He's robbing me!"

Harry Cola darted off like an arrow into the midst of a group of men, flung then right and left with a vigor no one could have suspected in his small frame, and leveled one like a shot by leaping up in the air and planting both heels in the man's back, crying:

"What's the matter here? Do you want to get discharged, all of you?"

The man he had knocked down was that terrible fighter, Frisbie, and before the rest could recover from their amazement, Cola's deep voice demanded:

"What's all this about? Clear out, all of you,

If you don't want to be spotted. I don't know any of you. Clear out."

The men took the hint and rushed out, even the valiant Frisbie scrambling up and running off, leaving Samuels alone with his arms up against his face, crouching on the ground as if afraid.

"What's the matter? Who's this?" asked Cola, roughly clutching his shoulder.

Samuels rose up, still holding a hand over his eye and saying:

"It's me, sir. I guess I saved my money, but one of 'em hit me, sir, with his fist and I warn't doin' nothin' to him."

"Well, why didn't you bit back?" asked Cola, contemptuously. "You great calf! I'd be ashamed to whine like that. You're the worst coward I ever saw. Get out and go home."

He wheeled about and went off to the office, while the kinder-hearted Harry said:

"Don't mind it, Samuels. He's hard, but he don't mean it. You were surprised. I don't blame you for calling help. I don't think you're a coward, but you're too confounded peaceable. Give one of those fellows a good clip, and they'll leave you alone. Did they hurt you?"

"I don't know, sir," said Samuels, moodily. "I'm scared I've got a black eye, and Mr. Cola may want to discharge me for it. I ain't sure, but I think so."

"Well, I'll answer for it, he won't," said Harry, warmly. "I'll have this bullying stopped. It's against the rules. Do you know who hit yon?"

"No, sir," said Samuels, mournfully. "It was so sudden-like I didn't see 'em, unless it was that Frisbie they calls the bad man."

Harry laughed heartily.

"He. Confound him! I can lick him. Here, you go home and keep out of their way till Monday. I'll see this persecution stopped. You're too good a man to be bullied. By the by, Samuels, the governor's going to see a sparring-match to-morrow, so we won't have any rehearsal and I sha'n't want you till Monday. Good-night."

He was turning away, when Samuels, to his surprise, laid his hand on his arm, and said, in a low, eager tone:

"Did you say a sparring-match, Master Harry? Are you sure? Where is it?"

Harry shook off his hand good-humoredly.

"Come, come, Samuels, none of that. It's none of your business. It's to see a new man fight a professional; that's all I can say. I haven't got a ticket. What is it to you? Your mother told you not to fight, didn't she?"

Samuels drew back apologetically.

"Yes, sir. I beg your pardon, sir. I hope you'll tell your father not to go, sir. It's so wicked, and they have such bad men there. He might get hurt, sir. I wish he'd keep away."

Harry burst out laughing as he went off, saying:

"I'll tell him, Samuels. Well, you're too green for anything."

Samuels looked after him, saw him enter the lighted office, still laughing, and heard him speak to Cola, when they both laughed even more uproariously.

"All right," he muttered; "we'll see whether my make up's a good one or not."

He slouched off into the street, looking keenly but furtively round him, and saw the same men who had attacked him waiting at a little distance on the road toward his old boarding-house.

"Oho!" he muttered. "Is that it, gentlemen? I may as well keep up the farce. Lucky I can run."

And he darted off at a swift run in the opposite direction, followed by the shouts and jeers of Frisbie's friends, who saw in his flight an evidence of gross cowardice. They only followed a few steps, however, and he kept up a swift run for several blocks, till he slowed down into a trot and gained, by a circuitous route, the back door of the new lodgings into which he and Steve had moved, unknown to the showmen.

He found Steve up-stairs smoking a pipe, and was greeted with the query:

"Well, how did it work?"

"To a charm. The fools saw the money, and tried to double-bank me. I yelled like a good one and let Harry Cola lick Frisbie for me. They all think I've got a black eye, and that I'm a regular calf. Cola said so."

Steve grinned.

"That's good. Well, the match is all right. We're to sleep there to night. The colonel thinks it's safest, so no one will notice a crowd coming."

Samuels drew his brows together.

"Steve, I've half a mind not to go."

Steve jumped up, horrified.

"Not go! What! Air you skeered?"

"I am. Not of the match, but—Cola will be there."

Steve started violently.

"Cola! Him! There! How do you know?"

"Harry Cola told me he was going to a sparring match, and wouldn't say where. What are we to do?"

Steve puffed at his pipe for nearly a minute before replying:

"Boy, we've got to risk it. Your make-up's

so different with that black wig and the way you talk and the stain, he won't know you."

"But you can't be hidden. He'll know you as the carpenter, sure."

Steve shook his head.

"Mebbe and mebbe not. I ain't no slouch at a make-up, neither. Tell ye what, I've got the idea. I'll be sick, and we'll get old Cap Storms to second you. He kin do it as well as me, I reckon."

"But where will you be?"

"I'll make a 'scuse to-night. I'll keep in the dressin' room. Van will do what we want him, or there won't be no match."

"Well, I trust it to you. When do we go?"

"As soon as we kin wash up and dress."

An hour later two fashionably-dressed gentlemen left the house, valise in hand. One was a tall, fair-faced, erect young man, irreproachably clad, the other a thick-set, military-looking person, with jet-black hair and mustache, in a fur-collared coat. They went out of the front door, walked rapidly to Madison Square, hopped a coupe, and were driven off, after a short conference with the driver, who remarked decidedly:

"Ten dollars is the lowest, gents. It's a long drive, and I won't get to bed till morning."

"All right," said the military man, and they entered the carriage and rattled over the stones, out across McComb's Dam, and into the lonely recesses of Westchester County, where they drew up, at one in the morning, before a large house, in the midst of beautiful grounds, full of dogs, who came baying round the carriage till called off from the house.

The midnight travelers paid the driver, went up the steps into the house, and were welcomed by a white-headed old gentleman, who closed the door ere remarking crossly:

"I thought you were never coming. The other party has been here since nine, and their man's asleep. You must want to throw away your chances, Mr. Marshall, to treat your man so carelessly."

The military-looking gentleman answered:

"All right, colonel. I know what he can stand. He don't fight before noon, and I'll let him sleep late and take a bath. He's good for the money, colonel, and if your skeered, say the word and we'll back ourselves."

The colonel looked more placable as he surveyed the magnificent frame of the young athlete, for he replied:

"Never mind now. I guess we can stand the risk. He looks a good one. But why didn't you come b'fore?"

"We've been moving, and had business, sir. If you'll let us go to bed now I'll take it as a favor. This is Mr. Slugger now, colonel, if you please. We've dropped the Novice for good."

"All right," said the colonel, and he escorted them personally to a large airy set of rooms with palatial furniture, where he said:

"There, boys, are your rooms. I guess you never were quartered so well. My servants will be up all night, so ring if you want anything. I want to do this thing up in the style it ought to be done. No brutality, I adore sport and courage. In the days when princes of the blood witnessed mills between Crib and Molyneux, we had no assassinations. I hate this knife and pistol work. Give me the good old-fashioned prize-ring. It makes a man show what he's made of. Good-night."

And the enthusiastic apostle of pugilism was going away, when Steve Marshall asked him:

"Please, colonel, may I ax a question?"

"Certainly."

"Is there a party by the name of Cola to be here at the match to-morrow?"

"Cola! Cola! Yes. A showman, I believe. One of Bomfelt's acquaintances. I don't know the man. He's not my style."

"Well, colonel. I've a particular reason to have him on a back seat, and not let him come near us, and not to know my man, 'cept as Slugger Sam. Kin you manage it, colonel?"

The colonel nodded.

"Certainly. I'll tell my friends, and they'll give him the cold shoulder. Bomfelt, of course, I can't answer for."

"I'll tell ye how ye kin, colonel."

"How?"

"We won't fight unless he keeps dark to Cola, who we are."

The colonel looked vexed.

"What do you mean? No crookedness?"

"Not a bit of it, colonel; but if that Cola recognizes us, we don't fight. You tell the jedge that I don't keer ef it costs all the money we've made. We won't fight, unless Cola's kep' out, somehow."

"Very well," said the colonel stiffly. "I'll see to it. He shall be kept out altogether, if you like."

"We'd be much obliged, and it would save an infinitude of trouble," interrupted the younger man earnestly. "We have reasons for our course, sir, singular as you may think it."

The colonel stared at the young man. He had never heard such language in his life, from a boxer.

"Why certainly," he said. "Mr.—a—a—"

"Slugger Sam, sir," said Marshall promptly.

The colonel smiled slightly.

"Mr. Slugger Sam; I will try and keep this Cola out; and, if that can not be done, for fear of his informing the police, I'll see that he does not give any trouble by too much curiosity. Is that enough?"

"Quite enough, sir," said Slugger Sam, in his quiet, smooth tones. "I trust the matter to your honor and discretion, colonel. At the same time, let me say, I shall do my best to win the money for my friends, and we have five thousand of our own, which we request you to put on for us at such odds as you can get. Mr. Marshall will hand it to you."

The colonel took the plethoric wallet and deliberately counted out the bills before he made any answer. Then he said slowly:

"You're very confident, I see; but Pastor is a very good man. I don't like to take the responsibility of this. I apprehend you are not rich men—"

"That's all we have," said Slugger Sam, quietly. "We don't want you to take any responsibility sir, except to put that on at good odds, if possible. We don't know any one as you do. That's all."

"Very well, gentlemen; I'll put it on for you. I may as well say, they're offering two to one on Pastor, on account of his experience. You, Mr. Sam, have never fought with bare knuckles, I believe."

"Never, sir. That's why I back myself. If you like to put that on for my knocking him out in twenty minutes, I'll consent."

The colonel stared.

"Twenty minutes! A man that has won five matches and held a draw with the ex champion. You're crazy! Why, I'd give you five to one on that, myself."

"Done!" said Sam quietly. "You have the money, sir, at five to one."

The colonel colored slightly, but nodded.

"You have me fairly, Mr. Sam. I must hedge with some one else. It will not be difficult, I fancy. Good-night."

He went away, and Marshall observed to his young companion, gravely:

"Sammy, my boy; you're young yet. I ain't sayin' but what you'll win. Only I say this: I wouldn't ha' done it."

"Why not?" asked Sam, as he began to undress to go to bed.

"Cause it ain't best to put too many eggs in one basket, Sammy. That's all. Now you get to bed, and I'll see to things."

Ten minutes later the young man was sleeping like an infant; but the veteran moved round the apartments for a good hour after, arranging all sorts of luxuries and conveniences for his man, after the fashion of a wary old trainer who regards his charge in the light of a baby to be tended with extra care, in consideration of what wonders he is expected to perform, some day.

CHAPTER XII.

A PRIZE FIGHT IN A PARLOR.

MR. COLA, elaborately dressed as usual, seated in a dashing turn-out, drove up to the door of Colonel Darling's house in Westchester, and handed the stately colored porter a card, inscribed:

SPECIAL SUNDAY RECEPTION.

COLONEL THOMAS JACKSON DARLING, U. S. A.

(Retired.)

At Home, Sunday, March 17th.

MR. COLA. Introducer, G. J. BOKFELT.

The porter scanned it, and said suavely:

"De gentleman please step to the waiting-room? De jedge has not arriven yet, sah."

"What's that got to do with me?" asked Cola sharply. "Isn't the card good?"

"Yes, sah;artinly, sah; but de ordahs is strick, sah. De introducer must see de pus on sah, for feah de wrong pusson might get de kyard, sah. No 'fense, sah, but dem's de cunner's ordahs, sah."

Cola compressed his lips, but said sulkily:

"All right, I suppose. It's a queer way to treat a gentleman, though."

"Drive round to de stables, you," cried the porter to the driver, and then he closed the door and ushered Cola into a suit of empty rooms, opening into one another.

In the last was a sofa, where the porter said:

"Sit down, sah. De minute de jedge comes, I send him to you, sah. Cigars on de table, sah."

Then he went away, and Cola, with a feeling of irritation he could not hide, heard him lock the doors of three rooms, one after the other, while the chamber in which he found himself was a picture-cabinet, lighted only from the roof, and about fifteen feet in the clear.

For a few moments he cursed like a trooper, and then laughed; for the situation was too ludicrous to admit of long anger.

"The old fellow's afraid of the law," he said to himself; "and he's right. I suppose I shall have to pledge myself not to reveal what I see. I'm willing; but it's a shame Bomfelt didn't tell me what was the rule!"

He lighted a cigar, from the store on the table, and, being a provident man, put several more in his pockets, saying, as he did so:

"So much ahead on Colonel Tom, with all his rules. How long must I wait, I wonder?"

He could bear nothing on account of his position, every sound being barred by three doors and a deafened wall. He smoked out one cigar; lighted another, looked at his watch, found it five minutes to twelve, began to curse again, and then, at last, heard the doors opening.

A moment later, Judge Bomfert, heavy and stern-looking, stood in the doorway, with four powerful men, behind him, all with black masks on. Cola started and laughed uneasily.

"What's all this mummery about?" he asked.

"What are you giving me, Gid?"

"Only this," said the judge awkwardly. "It seems the other gentlemen don't know you, and suspect you, as a stranger. I'm sorry to be compelled to ask you to give a pledge of secrecy under all circumstances, or you can't enter the room where the reception takes place."

"Why, of course," said Cola, relieved. "You know me well enough, Gideon. I won't say a word, on my honor."

Then the judge handed him a paper, which he signed, after a hasty perusal, and added:

"Now, you can come in. But mind; no one asks any questions. It's not etiquette."

"I understand," said Cola, and then they took him out along the rooms to the hall, where Bomfert said:

"Now you must be hoodwinked. It's a necessary precaution, you know."

"Certainly," said Cola, reluctantly. "I must say, though, you're a pretty fresh party in this house. Do what you like."

He was blindfolded, and then, to his surprise, found himself seized by the arms and legs, while Bomfert said:

"Don't resist. They're going to carry you, that's all. The boys won't admit you in any other way. Gently, men, don't hurt him. He's delicate."

Cola heard a smothered chuckle and felt himself lifted up, turned round three or four times, and then taken off at a trot, up-stairs and down-stairs, round all sorts of corners, till he heard the buzz of conversation round him and some one said:

"Cover your faces, gentlemen. The stranger is here."

There was a rustling and moving of chairs and then some one said to him:

"Now you can unbind your eyes."

Cola took off the handkerchief and found himself in a large, lofty saloon, furnished with palatial luxury, a heavy Axminster carpet on the floor, with sofas and chairs gathered around a regular boxing-ring, set up in the midst of the room, full twenty-four feet square.

Somewhere about a hundred gentlemen, all well dressed were seated round the ring, and, to the showman's intense mortification, every person wore a mask!

He had been seated on a chair outside the rest and his four stalwart conductors stood beside and behind him, watching him keenly.

In the ring were two men with their faces blackened, one with fair curly hair cut short, the other dark haired.

They were stripped to the waist in full fighting costume, and attended by masked seconds. One man had painted on his naked breast the figure 1, the other a similar figure 2.

The only person unmasks besides Cola and the gladiators was Colonel Darling, who immediately began to speak:

"Gentlemen, it is supposed that all in this room are men of honor, but it is a point of honor with me that I let none run a risk I cannot face myself. These men are to be known only by their numbers for the future and bets will be made on them that way. You know your men, and that's enough. No questions will be asked. As for you, men, you know why you came here. This is to be a fair match and may the best man win. Time."

Cola opened his mouth to speak and tried to rise, when he was gripped instantly and a low voice said:

"None of that, governor. Tain't allowed. We don't want to slug you, but we kin."

For a moment the athlete thought of a dash for liberty, but he felt that the odds were too great even for him, so he tried to smile and lighted a fresh cigar, spitting the end viciously on the rich carpet.

Instantly one of his guards brought him a large cuspidore and observed:

"Please to use that if you're a gentleman."

He took the bint and lighted his cigar, his face pale with mortification at the way in which he was being treated by every one; but he soon forgot it all in watching the men in the ring.

They were both handsome figures, the white-headed one as graceful as Apollo, the other more muscular and burly.

He could not recognize either face, for it was covered with a black skin of some quick drying paint, just like a mask.

It was too tantalizing not to know who they were, though he suspected one, from the figure, to be a well-known professional pugilist. The other he had never seen before, he felt certain. It was the white-headed No. 2, whose back was to him.

The men were sparring very cautiously, No. 1 trying to find an opening, No. 2 as wary as a cat at a mouse-hole. They sparred without a sound for nearly a full minute, when No. 1 let fly a vicious left-hander, followed up with the right, and in one instant the gladiators were at it in half-arm exchanges, quick as lightning, where it was impossible, from the rapidity of the fighting, to see what damage was done to either man as compared with the other, while the masked spectators involuntarily held their breath, and Colonel Darling said, warningly:

"Careful, gentlemen! careful! Remember the conditions. Sit down!"

And they sunk down, while the two men kept at it in the middle of the ring like tigers, till No. 2 gave No. 1 a terrible blow on the side of the head that sounded like a pistol-shot, and knocked him down like a felled ox, almost insensible.

Then he turned and walked to his corner, breathing heavily, and a hubbub of voices arose, suppressed but distinct.

"Two to one on No. 2!"

"Take it. You know me!"

"All right. T. J., isn't it?"

"Yes. You're F. V. S., ain't you?"

"Yes."

"I'll bet ten thousand No. 1 wins the fight yet, barring accidents, T. J."

"Done! I'm L. J."

"I'll bet any man one to five that No. 2 wins in twenty minutes. I'm C. V."

"Done! You'll lose, man. He's foxy, too foxy, for that. I'm J. G."

And so the bets ran, while Cola ground his teeth to think that every one in the room trusted every one else except himself, the tabooed stranger.

He called out distinctly:

"I'll bet any man in the room twenty-five thousand dollars even that No. 1 wins this fight in fifteen minutes! Come."

There was a low buzz, and all the black masks turned his way, when some one said, in a cold, harsh tone:

"Put up the money in the colonel's hands. I'll cover it."

"And who are you?" asked Cola, sharply.

"I'm a stranger here and don't know you."

"It's not necessary you should," was the cold reply. "Money talks here. Put up or shut up."

"I don't do business that way," said Cola, in his most sarcastic tone. "You may be sharper for all I know. I want to see your face."

There was a low ripple of laughter, if he had said something very amusing, when Colonel Darling came up and said blandly:

"None of this, if you please. Mr. Cola, we feel for your position, sir, but we can help ourselves. You know me. I will be the responsible party for the money if you man wins the match. You know me?"

"Yes," said Cola, reluctantly. "But I don't bet on any such one-sided conditions."

"Very well, sir. Then please be silent you refuse to accept our terms."

And the colonel went back to the ring, as No. 1, looking tired and worried, came to the scratch at the call of "time."

The second round was distinguished by the excessive caution of No. 1, while No. 2 pressed him confidently and drove him round the ring, unable to get at him in the close rally, till the retreating fighter went down under a comparatively light blow, that caused another hubbub of bets.

"Bet a thousand it takes more than five rounds to finish No. 1."

"Done. Make it ten?"

"Done! Is it C. V?"

"Yes. You're L. J."

"Yes."

And the bets flew at a rate that showed Cola he must be surrounded by very rich men indeed, till he heard one closed at fifty thousand dollars on the issue of the next round alone, C. V. betting that No. 1 would not be knocked out, an offer of twenty to one, finding a taker in L. J.

Cola's modest twenty-five thousand was nowhere amid such sums and he lay back in his chair and puffed a volume of smoke out, while he watched the round.

L. J. lost his money:

No. 1 received some terrible punishment, but fought gamely in a rally in which he was caught unawares, and went down in a heap, used up, but not senseless, when C. V. cried exultingly:

"I'll put it all on No. 2 now, for the next round. Who'll take it? Fifty thousand even."

"I will," answered L. J. sullenly. "Make it a hundred even, Van."

Cola pricked up his ears. The masked men were using names in their eager excitement of betting.

"All right," returned C. V. "I don't think No. 1 can last another round."

"I think he will. Down she goes."

And then every one was silent, as the men faced each other for the fourth round, No. 1 keeping well out of danger, No. 2 trying to hem him in his corner.

In this he succeeded within a very few steps,

as No. 1 kept on retreating, eying his white-headed antagonist.

The first intimation he received of his peril was the call of his second:

"Ware ropes, Patsy. He's gettin' ye in a hole, man. Spar to the side."

No. 1 tried to do so, but met his foe at every turn closing in till at last he felt the ropes touch him. The feeling lent him desperation, and he ducked his head to avoid punishment and ran in to close and wrestle, as his only chance.

Then, to the surprise of every one, No. 2 evaded the rush with a single step, caught his foe round the waist threw him over his hip, head down, and bumped him on the carpet with a force that shook the well-built house, when unlucky No. 1 lay still, and his seconds led to carry him to his corner, amid a perfect hush.

No. 2 walked to his own corner, with the quiet remark to Colonel Darling:

"That finishes him, sir. You'll see."

The colonel made no answer but to look at his watch and count the seconds.

When a minute was up he said distinctly:

"Time, men!"

No. 2 walked to the center, but No. 1 lay in his chair, unable to rise, and his masked second threw up the sponge.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel, looking at his watch, "time bets are decided. The men shook hands at fourteen minutes past twelve, by my watch. The fight occupied seventeen minutes and twenty seconds with the rests, and one minute and a half was lost by the disturbance with Mr. Cola.

No. 2 has won the match in twelve minutes, fifty seconds of actual fighting, and in the fourth round. I congratulate you all on having witnessed the squarest and best conducted match I ever saw."

Then the masked gentlemen broke up, and Cola was tapped on the shoulder by one of his guardians, who said curtly:

"Come along, guv'nor. Fun's over. You've got to be blinded again."

Cola bit his lips, but submitted in silence, when he was put through a similar course of sprouts in the mystifying line to what he had undergone before entering the room. When at last he received the order to unbind his eyes he found they had seated him in his own buggy, with his own man in it, outside of a locked gate, and he saw the masked men disappearing behind some evergreens, while half a dozen big dogs were snuffing at the bars of the gate, as if wanting to get out.

"Where have you been?" asked Cola, of his driver, when Tom turned a purple face on him, and hiccupped out:

"Shtable, sir, shtable! Besh whisky ever j'unk, sir. Bully goo' whisky! Phew! Git up, ye old skunk! Glang!"

And so saying, he dealt the horse a cut, and uttered a howl that showed him to be as drunk as it was possible to be.

He would have fallen out of the wagon if Cola hadn't caught him, and the manager was so utterly enraged at the way in which he had been outwitted at every turn, that he seized the reins and whip; dealt Tom a vicious blow that completely fuddled his senses; threw him down into the bottom of the wagon like a bundle of goods, covered him with the lap robe, after putting his feet on him; and so drove away, cursing all the next half-hour with an energy not to be exceeded by old Pap Robinson, who has the reputation of being the most profane person in the show business of two continents.

"But I'll get even with them!" he said to himself. "I'll have them all up for breaking the law against prize-fighting. I'll fix that Colonel Tom anyway, and Gid Bomfert. I saw their faces, and I know the house. I'll have them up. If I don't, my name's not Cola."

He was near a village, and drove about till he found a justice's residence. But the justice was not in—nor the next, nor the third, and fourth. The fifth was a stupid and nervous old man, with a long gray beard, to whom he told his tale, and I received the sage counsel:

"Now, my dear sir, ye ought to know better than to come to me av a Sunday. Sure I can't take complaints to day. Ye'll have to come to-morry. And the constables is all out, ye know, at a dog fl—I mean at church. Ye'd better come in the morning. Colonel Tom's a highly-respected citizen, but I'll have to take your complaint, av coarse. A prize-fight in a parlor! Ye amaza me. And all in masks, too! Are ye sure ye haven't been takin' laudatum, sir, and dreaming! Did ye say ye were a witness to the fight, sir?"

"Of course," cried Cola, angrily. "How else could I tell you the story?"

"And didn't ye try to part the combatants, sir?"

"Part the fiddlesticks—no!"

"And didn't ye remoind them they were all violatin' the law, sir?"

"I'd have looked nice, wouldn't I? No!"

"Ye're sure ye're blazin'!"

"Yes, I tell you."

The old justice put on his glasses, and surveyed Cola from head to foot, saying:

"Me dear sir, if ye insist, I'll have to take yer complaint; but are ye aware that by yer own admission, ye've broken the law yerself, and been aidin' and abettin' a prize-fight? I'm sorry for it, but I'll have to put you under heavy bail, unless, indeed, ye were to take the blind horse's hint, ye know—a nod and a wink. Good-mornin'."

And the old justice winked and nodded in the most elaborate manner, and then opened the door for Cola to go out, which the showman did, grinding his teeth, and drove away.

When he was gone, the old justice said to himself, rubbing his hands:

"And is it Tim Burke ye want to go back on the boys? Bad luck to ye for a black-muzzled thief!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. COLA LOSES HIS TEMPER.

MONDAY morning, at eleven o'clock, saw Cola at the Hippodrome, where he found Mr. Newgate, imperturbable as usual, at his letters.

"Good-morning," said the younger man, twisting his beard and eying Newgate furtively. "That was quite a lively affair yesterday, wasn't it, Newgate? You and your friends must have seen a heap of money change hands. You might have let me in."

Newgate spread open a letter, and said:

"I'm happy to tell you, Mr. Cola, that Hooper is out of danger. The doctor says he will sit up to-day, and can be interviewed this week."

Cola sneered bitterly:

"I knew that before. It's in the papers all about his conversion. But about yesterday. I know you were there, for I recognized your voice. I don't see why I should have been put on a different footing from you. I might have won a pot of money if you'd been square."

Newgate went on opening letters, as he said, in the very driest tone possible:

"Ah, by-the-by, a gentleman told me this morning that he heard you were at a low prize-fight yesterday, Mr. Cola, and nearly lost twenty-five thousand dollars on a time bet. Of course it's none of my business; but at the same time I must say that, if I thought it true, I should insist on your leaving the show. We can not afford to have such things said about our partners. This is a moral show or nothing. I hope it's not true for your sake, Cola, because we all like you."

Cola listened, with his teeth set like a vise, and then answered with a harsh laugh:

"Well, by heavens, you are the coolest hand I ever met, Newgate. I nearly won it, you mean. I bet on fifteen minutes, and the time of fighting was twelve-fifty."

Newgate lifted his eyebrows.

"Indeed! My informant said you lost your grip and backed out, when a gentleman offered to cover your money. You shouldn't try to swim among the big fish, Cola. You don't carry weight enough."

Cola was deadly pale to his lips, and his black eyes glowed like hot coals as he said:

"All right, all right. My turn will come. I've no more to say. Good-day."

And he went out of the office, quivering with a passion he found himself unable to repress, for the first time in years, while Newgate grinned almost imperceptibly, and made a note in his pocket-book:

"John Nichols. End of season. Bounce."

Then Cola went down, in a fume of fury that made him as cross as a bear, and found the usual humdrum rehearsal going on, with Samuels, dark and slouchy as ever, trying the wires for Corinne's act.

The manager looked at his assistant very sourly, but could find no pretext for any scolding, and stood smoking furiously and watching Samuels, till he had tested the catapult and found it all right.

Then came Corinne's turn to go on, and Lily came out of the dressing-room and tried everything, to the last drop, when Cola noticed that as Samuels helped her out of the net, the girl said something to him with a smile, to which Samuels replied politely.

To a man watching for a pretext to vent his ill-humor, this was enough; and Cola, with a quick step, walked up to the quiet, unoffending Samuels, with the remark:

"I told you not to talk to those girls. Now, you just take that."

Samuels was standing with his face to one side, and Cola struck at him, with the vicious intent of a man who hit to hurt.

Had the blow taken effect, he would probably have stunned even the giant he struck, but Samuels, with all his slouchy ways, seemed to be an adept in evading punishment, and he ducked his head and threw up his elbow as he fell, without offering any sort of resistance to the blow, but uttering a loud cry that attracted every one's attention. The result of his maneuver was that Cola's blow missed his head, while the manager's wrist was caught on the elbow of the workman and sharply sprained, so that he turned pale with the pain, and hissed:

"You clumsy calf! Get up, or I'll kick the soul out of you."

"Please, don't hurt me, sir," whined Samuels without rising, and Cola was about trying to execute his threat when Lily caught his arm, and cried, pleadingly:

"Oh, pa, please don't. He didn't mean any harm, indeed he didn't."

"What did he say to you then?" asked Cola, suspiciously, but turning to her, while Samuels scrambled up and retreated in haste behind a post.

"Nothing, sir, indeed," said Lily, earnestly. "I only said to him that the net felt as if he'd hung it just right, and he said, 'I try my best, miss, to please you all.' That's every word, I assure you."

Cola stood nursing his injured wrist and scowling at Samuels behind the post, as he said, savagely:

"Don't you talk to him any more, then, or you'll get him into trouble. Let him keep his remarks to himself, confound his ugly face. You go and get dressed to go home. These understrappers get their heads turned soon enough without your helping them. Be off."

Lily walked slowly off, pouting, and Cola turned and called to Samuels:

"You great cowardly calf, I've a mind to discharge you at once. Let me catch you disobeying my orders again, and I'll give you another such as I gave you then."

Then he turned away, while Samuels bid behind the post, close to which old Stevens was working, and whispered to the old man.

"That was a narrow shave, Steve. I very nearly broke his wrist."

So nearly, indeed, was this the case, that Cola came to the afternoon show with his right hand in his vest, while the paleness of his face showed he was in considerable pain, and he had to go home before his time; while, in the evening, his wrist was swathed in bandages, his arm in a sling, and he seemed to be quite quiet and subdued for the time.

Samuels worked on imperturbably, and had the satisfaction of seeing Cola go away before the catapult act, as soon as he had seen that no more words passed between Lily and her assistant.

When Harry Cola had finished his act he said to Samuels, confidentially:

"I hear the governor hit you to-day. I hope he didn't hurt you. He doesn't mean it; but something happened yesterday at that sparring match that put him out. I think he lost some money."

Samuels made no answer, and Harry went on:

"Don't bear malice, Samuels. The governor's a splendid fellow when you know him well; as kind as a man can be. Besides, he hurt his wrist pretty badly. What did he hit? your head?"

"No, sir. I think it was my elbow, but I don't know. I ain't used to fightin', sir. I has to jest crouch down and take it where it won't hurt so much."

Harry eyed him sharply, with a slight smile, as he said:

"Do you know, sometimes I think you're playing off on me, Samuels. I see Frisbie didn't black your eye, after all."

"No, sir. I'm very thankful, sir. I put a oyster on it all Sunday, and laid abed."

"Very sensible. Ab, by the by, Samuels, I've an engagement to-night. Will you take the girls home for me? They're waiting."

"Please, sir, Mr. Cola ordered me not to say a word to the young ladies."

"What of that? I tell you to follow them home. You needn't say a word."

"All right, sir, if you order me."

Samuels slouched after the two girls, who had evidently made the arrangement with Harry, and as they came to the entranceway, Maggie said cautiously:

"Samuels, you keep very close to us to-night. Lily has had more trouble with Pierrelli, and he's waiting for us. We trust to you."

Samuels said nothing but slouched closer, and as they came outside there was Pierrelli, sucking his cane and saying:

"Evenin', Mag; evenin', Lil. Bless my 'art! are you too proud to notice any one! 'Oo's that big bloke ye've got with ye? That's the chap Cola licked to-day—and served him right, too! 'Ere, you get out of the way; I'm a-going to see these ladies 'ome."

The girls walked on without deigning to notice his impudence, and he kept beside them—Samuels slouching close between them with his hands in his pockets, not saying a word.

As Pierrelli spoke his last sentence, he seized the big fellow's arm and tried to trip him, which, as he was a wiry little fellow, he would have done had not Samuels, with an awkward energy that was very ludicrous in its results, suddenly clutched and fallen with him, but on top of him, with a weight that caused the cockney to utter a grunt of pain, as Samuels's knee, in some incomprehensible fashion, went into the pit of his stomach, and knocking all the wind out of him.

The big man was up in a moment, saying:

"I beg yer parding, sir, I'm sure! I couldn't help it. Please don't hit me, sir. I didn't mean

it, sir. Ob, it's Mister Pierrelli! I thought he was some loafer, sir. Hope I didn't hurt ye, sir."

And Pierrelli could not say a word for the intense pain, while he heard the girls giggle as they hurried on; and Samuels, after several moments' apologizing, suddenly said:

"Oh, my! the cops'll run me in if I don't get away. Good-night, sir."

And with that he left the fallen cockney, and strode after the girls, turned the corner and disappeared just as Harry Cola came up and started back with affected surprise.

"Why, Mr. Pierrelli," he said, "what's the matter! Did you have a fall?"

Pierrelli looked up ruefully. He could not speak yet, and felt very sick; but he knew that Harry must have seen the whole affair, and he had to pretend he didn't know anything of the sort.

He made signs to be helped up, and Harry assisted him to his feet, when he managed to say in gasps:

"Yes—I had—a fall. Don't say anything—I—"

And then the sickness overcame him, and he nearly dropped again, but for Harry holding him up.

After a few minutes he was better, and went sadly home; while Harry pursued his way to the hotel, muttering:

"He won't bother us any more."

He met Samuels slouching along soon afterward, and stopped him, saying:

"I saw that, Samuels. You can't play it off any more on me. You know something about fighting."

Samuels spread out his hands apologetically.

"Indeed, sir, I didn't mean to hurt the little gent, sir. He tripped me, and I fell on him; that was all, sir. I kin wrastle a bit, sir, I don't deny; but as fur fightin', I can't stand it, sir; I wilts every time a man comes fur me. I can't help it. I was borned so, I s'pose."

Harry looked at the big fellow doubtfully, and answered him:

"I don't know what to make of you. You're a great, overgrown booby to let people pick on you as they do in the show. I shall have to teach you how to box, I believe. Did you ever try it?"

Samuels nodded.

"Jest once, sir, when I were a kid only 'bout sixteen. It was in the Paris show, with a seller called Jackson, and they put me up, sayin' he wouldn't hurt me."

"Jackson? why, he's a professional! Well, what did you do?"

"I did the best I knew how, sir, 'cause the ring master said he'd whip me into rags if I didn't fight."

"That was nice! Well!"

"Well, sir, Jackson be jest knocked me stiff in the fust round, and I bain't never dared put on the devilish gloves sence."

Harry laughed heartily.

"I don't wonder. Well, you'll have to put them on with me soon. I've made up my mind to teach you. I'm sick of being guyed by the men on your account. You are big enough to fight, and I'm going to teach you a little. You come with me to the hotel to-morrow after rehearsal."

"Yes, sir," said Samuels, timidly. "Thank you very kindly, sir. I s'pose you're a great boxer, sir, ain't you?"

Harry laughed.

"Pretty fair for a light weight. I can't hope to finish you, you know. You're too big. But I can start you right, and then I'll get the governor to give you a few set-tos, to get you into proper trim."

Samuels looked frightened to death.

"Oh, dear, sir, is he a boxer, too? I'd be jest skeered to death to face him. He's real wicked when he gets his mad up."

Harry smiled with some pride.

"That's a fact. He's a hard old nut to crack. But I'll tell him not to hit too hard. He's the best boxer I ever saw, outside of the professionals; and I've known him to kill a man with his fist."

Samuels shook all over.

"Oh, dear, sir! And you want to make me box with him!"

"Only with soft gloves, you stupid fellow. He won't hurt you much, and I won't trust you with him till I think you know something, and at least can take care of yourself. But I'm too light to finish you, and I've set my heart on your whipping that gas-bag, Frisbie, before all the show, some day when he's saucy."

Samuels looked grateful.

"I'd be real glad if I thought you could teach me to do that, sir; 'cause he's allers a-pickin' on me, so I dassin't go through the menagerie no more."

Harry shook his hand cordially, saying:

"You come to morrow, and I'll give you your first lesson, and get the governor into good-humor with you besides."

Then he went to the hotel, where he found Cola bathing his wrist in hot water, and looking glum, to whom the boy said:

"I say, pa, you were too hard on that poor

fellow, Samuels, to-day. He didn't mean a bit of harm. He can't help the girls speaking to him, and he never answers more than he can help."

Cola frowned slightly as he answered:

"I've got to keep them all in good order, and a little knocking down's healthy for them, confound his awkward carcass! I got the worst of it. The thing couldn't have happened if he hadn't made that clumsy school-boy parry. A little more I should have broken my wrist. I wish some one would teach him how to box, so he'd get mad and strike back. It would do them all good to see me lick the biggest man in the show."

Harry laughed.

"You're too savage, governor. That's not at all necessary. Samuels doesn't need a licking. But I tell you what it is, if you've no objection, I'll give him some lessons, and you can finish him. He's big enough, if he only had the heart in him; and he doesn't look like a coward to me, though he acts so."

Cola shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, Harry. Do as you please; but you will find he's no good."

"We'll see, governor. Good-night."

From that day forward Cola's temper got better toward Samuels, and he let things go on in the ring and at rehearsals with less and less interference, while the show went along with wonderful prosperity, and the reports of health from the great Hoopler were more and more encouraging.

Every day also Samuels accompanied Harry Cola to the hotel, where the little athlete gave the clumsy giant lessons in sparring, at which the pupil evinced the most intense stupidity and awkwardness.

He would go through his motions at the word of command very well as long as they were slow; but as soon as Harry engaged him in free sparring, he seemed to lose his head and allowed the little man to shower blows on him as if he had no idea of parrying.

He was so tall that Harry seldom reached his face, and as they went on his strength became so apparent that the little man got tired out sparring with him, while Samuels did not seem to know any more than when he started, except to keep his head out of danger and hit like a clumsy giant, missing every blow.

Once Harry deliberately coaxed him to strike, and took the blow on the top of his head, a little to one side where it was hardest.

Samuels struck out with such force that he sent the little man flying across the room nearly stunned, and then threw away the gloves with a cry of horror.

"Oh, Mr. Harry, I didn't mean it, indeed I didn't. I'm sick a clumsy slouch. I ain't fit to box with no one, I ain't."

The boy was considerably shaken up, but he smiled as he said:

"Serves me right. I was trying to see if you knew how to hit, and, by Jove, I can't do any more with you. Why, man, you're as strong as a horse."

"I can't help it, sir. I was borned so," was the apologetic answer, and then Harry told Cola that evening:

"You'll have to finish that fellow. He's too much for me, with all his clumsiness. Give him a lesson or two."

But Cola, to the surprise of his son, refused, saying:

"I don't think it's good policy. Let him think he knows it all. I let you teach him on purpose, but I know he'll not be good for anything; and if he is, I don't want him. I can whip any man in the show now, and I'll get a chance some day to whip this Samuels."

"But why? What has the poor fellow done?"

Cola hesitated, and cast a singular look at the boy as he answered:

"None of your affairs. He's like a man I once knew, and I hated him. That's all. You leave Samuels alone now. Let him fight Frisbie. That'll be fun enough. He won't learn much there from that gas bag. We go on the road next week, and you'll have a better chance. By the by, we're all going up to Hoopler's tomorrow, with the reporters. He's going to be interviewed. You attend to things while we're gone."

It was the last night of the International Hippodrome in the city, and the house was packed with people, and rung with applause. When it was all over, Mr. Newgate said to Mr. May, a silent, grim gentleman, with grizzled beard and shaven upper lip—old style:

"We've taken in over a hundred thousand in the three weeks, May; and if we work the religious business well to-morrow, we'll have good business for a long time."

Mr. May nodded, for he was a man of very few words, and said shortly:

"Hoopler's the man to work that racket."

"I've told him so. There's one thing about him—he's show all over."

May smiled very grimly.

"You bet he is. But, I say, Newgate—"

"Well?"

May looked round to see no one was within hearing, and then whispered:

"What an in-fernal-old-fraud-he is."

Cola shrugged his shoulders.

"It's his business," was all he answered.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PIous SHOWMAN.

MR. HOOPLER, his huge face hanging in loose wrinkles, of a pale, unwholesome yellow; his portly frame shrunken, so that his clothes hung on him like bags, lay back in a large invalid chair, in a handsomely furnished saloon, in his own house, in Madison, N. J.

House and grounds were built for show purposes, and carried their high mission into every stick of wood, dab of paint, patch of gilding and bed of flowers.

Outside and inside, the house looked as if intended for a Bowery side-show, with gimerack ornaments, made by machinery, stuck on every conspicuous place. The furniture was made by contract, and the floors trembled whenever any sort of a crowd was in the parlor, while the walls were adorned with chromos and cheap engravings, and the carpets were of tawdry pattern.

It was the third house Mr. Hoopler had built in the same place, and not quite so loud as its predecessors; for even a showman may learn a little taste after twenty years. His first was a Swiss cottage, that he called "Mont Blank Castle."

It cost fifteen thousand dollars, and he put in the bills at fifty thousand.

His second was a Persian mosque, which he denominated "Gulistan."

His third was the composite mass of machine ornament, in which he now lay, a convalescent, and which he proudly denominated "Nonpareil," a title it fully deserved, from green-house to cellar.

The parlor was full of showmen, come to congratulate their acknowledged king on his recovery from gastric fever, brought on by a surfeit which even his powerful physique had been unable to digest.

He looked aged by his illness; but his sunken eyes twinkled, bright as ever, and his high cracked voice was quite clear, as he said to them:

"Glad to see ye, glad to see ye, boys. Does me good, does me good. The old man's got a little business left in him yet. Had a hard time, a hard time. Doctor James was here, and I told him to spare no expense, no expense, for the sake of my partners, you know, sake of my partners. Don't care myself, not a bit. Ready to go, ready to go. Had up fifteen doctors from the city. Consultation, at how much was it, Meriden?"

"A hundred dollars apiece, Mr. Hoopler," said his factotum gravely.

"Yes, yes; cost a sight, Newgate. All for my partners, you know. Told 'em to spare no expense. Know the show could get on without me; but did it out of pure friendship, May, pure friendship. Always stick to my friends. How are ye, Cola? Heard you were at a prize fight. Bad business, bad. Since I've been sick, I've been very thankful for the good principles taught me by my sainted mother and excellent wife. Where's Faith. Ah, there she is. Fifty years married, gentlemen, and never had a difference. Best of wives, best of mothers."

He was right there, and they all knew it, though poor Faith could hardly return the compliment in kind to the husband and father.

No one interrupted him; even Cola did not dare to sting back. The old man knew his value and power too well, as he talked.

"Ah, Gittuppe, are you there too? I've had to do a heap of thinking lately as to you, Gittuppe. You'll ruin your digestion by so much smoke and drink. It's ruinous. If you'd been in my place, you'd have gone under sure. I see from the papers your menagerie don't look as it ought to do. Reporters say the lions too many, and the tigers too small. Well, Gittuppe. Must keep your end up, or we have to settle up. If it wasn't for May here, and little Sterne working the papers, we'd be left. Haven't seen a line about anything, but my elephants."

"You're mistaken," urged Gittuppe, springing into reply. "We had two columns in the Moon last week about a night in my menagerie. Took immensely."

The old man grinned.

"I told Sterne to get it done well, so as not to queer the show too much."

Gittuppe ground his teeth, but made no answer; and Hoopler went on:

"Don't see much about anything but the elephants, and Pierrelli and Fowle. I tell you, gentlemen, the old-fashioned show, of real merit draws the people best. These fakes of Cola's won't last. Some day a wire breaks, and where's your girl? Gone, all gone. We'll try it this season, but I haven't much faith in it. Why don't you get something new, Cola?"

"I think I have given you something new," retorted Cola, blandly. "Corinne and Pippa get more notices than all the rest, and they're not paid for, neither. I can work the papers myself when I choose."

"Can you now?" asked Hoopler, innocently.

"Queer." Show word, meaning to undervalue; to write or talk against; to deprecate. A "queer show" is a poor one; to "queer a show" is to make others think it poor.

"Then why don't you have the politeness to ~~w~~ in the name of the show when they notice Corinne, instead of having it from Cola's Paris Aquarium? It ain't according to our contract, and I want it stopped. Isn't that so, Newgate? Sterne don't do it."

Newgate closed his grim mouth to hide a smile, as he said, shortly:

"It's all right, Mr. Hoopler."

Hoopler's cunning eyes twinkled as he saw Cola's confusion at being openly attacked before so many showmen, and he went on, rubbing his hands:

"Never mind. Cola's not used to our ways. He's got a good show coming in the next boat. A lot of cannibals. They'll take. That's fresh! And now, gentlemen, I'm getting tired. It's my first week out of bed, and I've got a long interview with the reporters ahead. You won't mind if I have 'em in now?"

"Certainly not."

"Let's have 'em."

"Of course."

"Call 'em in."

They were delighted with the idea; for they saw in it what showmen long for—a big notice. So the reporters were sent for, and filed in, notebook in hand, a look of eager expectation on every face, as they were introduced to the magnate of the show business by a little fair-haired fellow with a weary air, to whom Hoopler said, in a weak, piping voice:

"Why, Sterne, I'm very glad to see you. How are all your family! Gentlemen, I wish I were a little stronger. You must take the will for the deed. Meriden, ask Doctor James to step here a minute."

The reporters looked frightened at his pale face and weak voice, while the showmen pulled long faces and nudged each other.

May and Newgate had withdrawn to a window, and May whispered:

"What an in-fernal-fraud-he is!"

Newgate looked like a statue of silence, as Meriden hurried out and brought in the doctor; for Mr. Hoopler seemed as if he was about to have a relapse.

The doctor felt his pulse, gave him some medicine in a glass, and said, solemnly:

"Gentlemen of the press, be brief. Mr. Hoopler is unable to stand much excitement. His spirit is greater than his strength. I can only let you have ten minutes."

Hoopler put up a trembling hand and whispered faintly:

"Say fifteen. I've so much to say, so—much—I'm sc—so thankful."

"Well, then, let them do the talking, and don't excite yourself," said the doctor in a severe tone. "You must avoid business as much as possible, till your return from Europe. I won't answer for your life if you don't obey orders."

Down went in the note-books, "Hoopler—Europe—Health—Very weak."

Then the doctor went out, and the scribes began to question the great Hoopler, in a timid, apologetic way, while he slowly revived as he answered, and finally began a piping monologue which gave them no time to ask any more questions.

"I can't say much about business—I'm too weak. But I want to tell you, gentlemen, and I want you to put it down, that I am thankful—yes thankful, for this illness, that has brought me so near the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It has made me look back on my past life with such a different eye. As I lay dying here I thought it all over, and I made up my mind to be a different man. I do not regret it one bit, because it has brought me so much nearer to what I ought to be. I feel so peaceful and happy now. I know my sins are forgiven me. Oh, young gentlemen! let me warn you all. Don't be eager after money. It is the root of all evil. Be good men; be earnest Christian workers. Think of a better world, as I do daily. Oh, you don't know what an exquisite happiness it is to know that you're saved, and how a good Christian hungers and thirsts after bringing every one else to righteousness! I see my poor friends in the show business round me in the bonds of iniquity yet, and I pray for them daily. I pray for you, gentlemen of the press. I know your temptations. I was a reporter myself once. Avoid rum; avoid tobacco; avoid all sinful pleasure; for at the last it stingeth like an adder. Oh, how blessed a thing it is to be a Christian! Doctor! Doctor!"

He sank back as if exhausted. The poor reporters jumped up in a fright; in rushed the doctor and waved them off wildly, and out of the room they shuffled, showmen and all, to hold an animated discussion on the chances of the old man's life out on the croquet ground, while Hoopler gasped and moaned under the doctor's hands until he had swallowed several ounces of the best brandy, when he expressed himself better and sent away the doctor.

And all this while Newgate and May had remained in the room, in a recess of the window. Mrs. Hoopler had gone.

The old man looked up and round with a sly twinkle of his eye, spying May.

"Come here, May," he said.

May obeyed, with his hands in his pockets.

"Well," he said, shortly.

"May," said the old man, "you don't like this sort of thing." And he chuckled.

May looked sourly at him, answering bluntly:

"No, I don't."

"And why not, why not, why not?" he piped, rubbing his hands.

May curled his lip.

"If you don't know, I sha'n't tell you."

"But it pays, don't it, Newgate?" he asked.

Newgate twisted the end of his beard.

"Yes. It pays—you."

"And you too, and you too. I do it all for your sake, boys. I don't want any more fame or money. I'm thinking of a better world—"

May uttered a snort and burst out:

"Well, by—"

Then he stopped short.

Hooper grinned.

"Well, May, swear away. It's refreshing to hear a man like you, that can swear. Go on."

May instantly pulled himself up and said:

"Oh, nothing. It's not worth swearing about. But I tell you what it is, Hooper—"

"Well, what is it? Speak out freely. I don't mind what you say," cackled Hooper.

"Well, then, Mr. Hooper, I'll tell you. I've been in the show business thirty five years—"

"Thirty-seven, May. I've been fifty. You were only a kid when you began."

"Well, thirty-seven, then. I've seen the mermaid, and the woolly horse, and the long-haired women, and the What Is It! and all the fakes that ever were faked, from a hippodrome to a Chatham street side show, with a barrel-organ for music—"

"Well, May, well, what of it!"

"I thought I'd seen every sort of fraud that ever walked the face of the earth, and that nothing could surprise me any more," said May, with some little vehemence. "I thought I'd run through the alphabet of frauds—"

"And you found you hadn't," chuckled the old man, complacently. "Go on, May. I don't want to interrupt you."

May stopped, and the slight flush died out of his face, as if he were ashamed of his warmth of feeling, as he said slowly:

"There's not much more to say. I'm only sorry for one thing."

"And what's that, what's that, what's that?"

"That you're not ready to stuff," said May, distinctly.

For the first time, the look of complacency left the old man's face, and he actually turned red as he stammered angrily:

"What d'ye mean, what d'ye mean, what d'ye mean, May? Stuff! Stuff!"

May smiled as he looked down at him.

For once in his life, the ever ready Hooper was taken aback, and didn't catch the point, till May answered in the same distinct manner.

"I mean that I'll give a hundred thousand dollars for your skin, to put in a glass case with a proper label."

The old man had recovered himself instantly, and now he answered sneeringly:

"Very funny, very funny. What do you know about labels? You can't invent a title that takes the people, like my 'What is it?' I suppose you'd label me—well what, just for fun now? What?"

"THE GREATEST FRAUD ON EARTH," said May, in his deep harsh tones. "Good-day, Hooper. If you want to sell your skin to stuff, I'll take it any time, at what I said."

And he went out, leaving Hooper actually unable to sting back, so sharp was the home thrust given by the usually silent and reticent May.

The old showman turned to Newgate, and said with a forced laugh:

"May's rough, isn't he? What's the matter with him, what's the matter?"

Newgate shrugged his shoulders, with an invariably stolid face.

"Nothing particular, only he found that he had something, down under his hide, that the rest didn't have. That's all."

Again the old man was at a loss, and he showed it in his querulous answer:

"What d'ye mean, what d'ye mean, Newgate? Confound your way of talking. Swear a little. I've not heard a good ripping old show oath for a month. What d'ye mean that May's got under his hide?"

"Something I guess you lost when you were weaned," said Newgate dryly.

"And what's that, what's that?"

"Only a conscience," was the serene reply. "It's not worth mentioning, Hooper. Good-day."

And the grim financier walked out of the room, without a smile on his face, leaving Hooper alone with Meriden, who never expressed an opinion.

The old man sat for some minutes with a singular look upon his face. He seemed to be cogitating something very deeply, and at last he broke out with a sly chuckle, as he muttered:

"Think they've got me, don't they? Stuff my skin, eh? We'll see. By the Lord Harry, I won't die to please 'em. I'll live to spite 'em all."

And then his cunning old face grew dark as

night as he muttered over a string of blasphemies, such as only showmen and old army officers can afford to indulge in, while Meriden remained by him, as patient and silent as ever, till the old man suddenly pulled himself up and smiled, saying to his factotum:

"Meriden, sit down and write a letter for me."

Meriden took his seat silently.

"Write:

"MESSRS. TOMBS AND WARREN:—

GENTS:—I accept your offer for next season, on condition the baby elephant is to be my property at the valuation we fixed. Prepare the papers and send them to my lawyer. If they're all right, I will make the agreement. Yours truly."

Meriden wrote as directed, and the old man signed his name in a hand that was surprisingly firm and strong.

Then he said to Meriden in a rather menacing tone:

"You understand now, no leaky vessels in my employment. This is not to come out before the end of the season. We'll have to fight them hard all summer to get good terms, and you won't be left out in the cold if you keep my counsel. We shall want a treasurer in the combined show, and you can bet he's my man. I'll show these Flatfoots I can come down as flat as they can. Stuff me, indeed! Greatest Fraud on Earth!"

Then he began to chuckle to himself as if thinking of something amusing, and at last he burst out:

"By the Lord Harry, I've got it, Wash."

Meriden's only answer was a look of polite inquiry.

"I've got May's name down fine, and I'll see he gets it too."

"Yes, sir."

"You don't know what it is, do you?"

"No, sir."

"The greatest fool on earth—and I'll see he gets it."

And the old man nearly choked in his malicious cackle, as he went on:

"And I've got Newgate, too, and don't you forget it, Meriden. I'll teach him to come virtuous airs over me, curse him for a pious old thief!"

Meriden said nothing, and Hooper went on, rubbing his hands:

"I'll show him I've got something he hasn't got, curse him. Only a conscience! Eh! I've got something he hasn't got under his hide, and I'll show him too before next summer. Do you know what it is, Meriden?"

"No, sir."

"Curse you for an idiot then! It's IDEAS. They haven't got an idea in the whole gang of them. I'll show 'em such snaps as they never thought of, when I go off to Europe. Oh, Meriden, I tell you what it is. I have the luck of it. No show for me this summer, my boy; but if I don't hunt up some novelties, my name's not Hooper. And they don't get a smell of 'em neither. Stuff my skin, will they? I'll show them the old man's alive yet, and don't you forget it, Wash. IDEAS are worth money, and I'm boiling over with them. Get me the brandy, you infernal idiot."

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE ROAD.

THE Great International Show was on the road, moving from city to city, with a small army of employees; a baggage train a mile long; a regiment of bill-posters in advance, under direction of the grim and silent May, and the fair-haired, weary-looking Sterne who worked the papers.

They had been fighting the Paris Show from Dan to Beersheba and had beaten it at every point, to the disgust and secret admiration of Messrs. Tombs and Warren, who inserted scandalous advertisements in the country papers to run down Hooper's show, and were never so much as noticed by the wary advance men of the other side, who thus gained the reputation of being quiet martyrs, and attracted sympathy to their own concern.

Mr. Hooper's absence in Europe for his health; his pious interview; the loss of his eloquence in the ring; all were utilized to fan the popular interest to excitement, and the International was able to record the unexampled fact in show business, that it left every town with a clear profit, however small, and had not lost money at a single station.

The battle raged fiercely in the advance; and the excitement in the rival offices was intense; but inside the show itself affairs went on in the usual quiet, humdrum style, the interest of the performers being confined to the question of board at the next station, and the amount of notices received by each performer.

Saturday nights soon ceased to be subjects of speculation, such was the confidence placed in the "Flatfoots" and their grim chief, Mr. Newgate, who paid regularly and scanned every bill carefully, to cut things down to the lowest figure.

Mr. Pierrelli made no further advances toward the girls who played Corinne, but confined himself to slurs among the performers, which the girls were unable to resent.

Corinne "took" everywhere, and proved a great success, while Cola's face grew more bland and smiling daily, and Gittuppe laid on flesh like a prize pig.

The girls attracted attention wherever they went, and the newspaper men were wild after them. One man even left his place on a good paper to follow the show, imploring Maggie to marry him, so much was he impressed with the difference between the two modest, lady-like young women, and the general run of show people.

In the mean time the quiet and slouching Samuels pursued the even tenor of his way.

Cola ceased to watch him, and frequently left the show for days at a time, to run itself, while he departed on mysterious expeditions.

That terrible fighter, Frisbie, continued to feed the lions as usual, and lost no opportunity of "picking on" Samuels, sneering at him on all occasions, and setting the animal men on to do the same: till, by his long persistence, he divided the show into two parties: the animal men on one side, the ring performers on the other; the latter being attracted to Samuels by sympathy with his quiet, inoffensive ways and his evident strength and mastery of his business.

The ring men were all skillful athletes, and perfectly ready to fight; so that the animal men did not care to attack them, or molest Samuels before them; but they kept up such a tirade of sneers at the big man for his cowardice, that the ring men grew angry, and made up their minds the thing must stop.

One day Mr. Maiden, the champion leaper, a handsome young fellow, came to Samuels, and said to him abruptly:

"Samuels, this has gone on long enough. We've concluded on one thing. You've got to whip Frisbie, or leave the show."

Samuels had been listening with an air of visible anxiety, for Maiden had called him to one side in a mysterious manner. When the leaper finished he said:

"How kin I do that, Mr. Maiden? Frisbie's a fighter, and I hain't no more grit than a gal. I was born so."

"I don't believe it," said Maiden bluffly. "I've been watching you ever so long. So we all have. You ain't no coward, or you couldn't move around the way you do."

Samuels looked much disturbed.

"What way do you mean, sir?" he asked.

"Minding your own business and taking care of those gals. I don't mind telling you, Samuels, I'm after one of 'em myself, and—"

Maiden started slightly, and interrupted him:

"Which one? which?"

His brown eyes had lost their usual sleepy expression, and his dark face had an eager intent look on it, that Maiden had never seen there.

"Why, Lily, of course," he answered. "There's a pile of money in that gal. Me and her could get first class engagements together; and besides, she's a nice gal."

Samuels had resumed his usual sleepy look, and answered listlessly:

"That's all right, I s'pose, if the lady thinks so. Mr. Maiden."

Maiden twisted his mustache with some pride, as he said:

"I ain't much on the mash, generally, as a rule, Samuels; but I ain't no slouch at it neither, when I set my mind on it. We're jest about agreed, except about a little business, which we're to leave to a third party, Mr. May. I'm quite willing to let the Flatfoots decide."

Samuels stood caressing a mustache he had lately allowed to grow, but said nothing.

Then Maiden went on:

"But that's neither here nor there, only I got the facts through Lil. She made me swear I wouldn't tell any one but you, and I hain't done it yet."

Samuels regarded him keenly, with a furtive sidelong scrutiny that looked as if he was very uneasy, but Maiden went on, without noticing him:

"It ain't much, to be sure; nothing wrong; but Lil says she thinks you're playin' off for a flat, and that you know more'n you let on to us. She says she's seen you knock two men stiff, as if they was babies, all along of their insulting her in the street."

Samuels eagerly interrupted him.

"Tain't so. I didn't hit 'em. It was all a accident, sir. One on 'em slipped, and I tripped him unawares, and the other was Pierrelli. He threwed me, only I fell on top, and squinched the wind out of him—all by a accident, as might happen to any man. Don't git up a fight fur me, Mr. Maiden; I ain't able fur this Frisbie. He'll eat me up, and I don't want to leave the show, nuther."

Maiden listened attentively, and then replied:

"The boys all like you, Samuels, but they think you're too peaceable altogether. We don't mind bein' spit upon, as the sayin' is, but we don't want it rubbed in. We've come to the conclusion you kin whip Frisbie all to pieces if you wanter, and the end of it is you've got to do it, or let him whip you, and show you're a man in gettin' the whippin'."

Samuels listened attentively, and his voice was rather plaintive as he replied:

"I ain't no fighter, Mr. Maiden, but if the boys is set on i—"

"They are. Chalk it down!"

"I kin wrastle a bit, Mr. Maiden, and if Frisbie won't hit me, I'm willing to try him a square hold, or a side-hold, or a catch-as catch-can. I can't say fairer nor that, kin I?"

Maiden nodded.

"Guess that'll be satisfactory. I'll tell the boys, and see what they say; but mind, you jest got to do your darnedest, or we'll make the show too hot to hold ye!"

Then he went away, and Samuels sought his friend Stevens, to whom he said quietly:

"They're beginning to be suspicious, Steve."

He told him of Maiden's offer, and Steve remarked, sagely:

"I suppose you've got to come out some time, but I tell you one thing: that Frisbie's a treacherous cuss, and he'd jest as lieve break hold and go fur a rough and-tumble, if he found he was getting the worst."

Samuels smiled slightly.

"I've watched him pretty carefully, and he can't do it but what I'll manage to get the best of him, without letting out our secret. But, I say, Steve—"

"What, boy?"

"Maiden's after Lily for her company, and he says the girl likes him."

"That's nothing to you, boy."

"No, I suppose not; but she ought to know it."

"Know what?"

"That he wants her money—not her."

Steve grinned.

"Sammy, my boy, you're jest the cleverest feller in your line I ever seen; but you don't want to go out of it. You don't know nothin' bout gals. I've bin married, and well married—two-t-and all wimmin is alike. She'll find him out, and don't you forget it."

"Then you think she don't like him? You see more of them than I do. They don't keep aloof from you."

Steve laughed silently.

"I b'lieve the boy's gone on one of 'em, and I reckon I know which. Yes: I see a heap of all the gals—more'n I want. They get a-callin' me Pop Stevens, and actin' like I warn't nobody, because I fix up their dressin'-rooms, as the oldest man in the show. I've seen this Maiden mashin' round Lily and Maggie. Mag won't notice him, but Lil's young and flighty. Reckon she thinks some of marryin' him, but I ain't sure. I know what'll fix it."

"What, Steve?"

"The contracts, boy."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know, Mag's out of her time the end of this season; but Lil's got two or three year to run. Cola gets five hundred a week for them and the boy, and he jest gives 'em spendin' money, and as little of that as he kin."

Samuels ground his teeth.

"I know that. Never mind; his turn will come some day. Go on."

"But the gals is fond of him, because he talks sweet and dresses 'em nice. Lil is, anyway—can't tell so much about Mag; she's older, and knows more. But the time will come when Lil marries. The old man will want to run her contracts just the same, and the gal will trust him. She calls him pa, and that goes a gr. at way with gals."

"But if she marries Maiden?"

"He'll want to have her contracts to himself, and the split'll come there, or I don't know nothing 'bout gals."

So saying, the oracular old carpenter went on with his work and Samuels stood with his hands in his pockets, a thoughtful whistle puckering his mouth, till some one behind called out:

"Look at the big lummox. Bet ye five dollars I go up and smack him in the mouth and he won't say nothing."

It was Frisbie's voice, echoed by a laugh from the animal men, the show being nearly empty at the time, for rehearsals had been dropped for a week.

Samuels glanced round and saw Frisbie coming toward him, his eye gleaming with malice and a brutal desire to inflict pain on one he thought unable to retaliate.

The big man instantly held up both arms like a school-boy expecting his ears to be boxed, and the animal men shouted:

"Smack him good, Frank!"

Frisbie laughed savagely, ran up and leveled a heavy blow at Samuels's head with his clinched fist.

Down went Samuels's head and the blow passed over it, when he suddenly stooped still lower, grasped Frisbie, digging his head into the bully's stomach, lifted him bodily on one arm, half-turning his back in so doing, and, before the amazed animal men could realize what had happened, Fighting Frank Frisbie was flung up in the air and came down on his head like a log, when he rolled over and lay senseless.

Then Samuels, his eyes flashing, ran over to Stevens, picked up a broad-ax and called out, as if desperate:

You sellers leave me alone. I ain't doin' nothin' to you. I ain't no fighter, but by gum I'll make bash of some of you, if you try to pick on me any more."

What the animal men might have done is uncertain, for their blood was up and they thought Samuels only a coward in a corner, who had done something he dared not or could not repeat.

But just as they were scattering to get weapons, Maiden and the ring men came running in, gathering round Samuels and cheering gleefully.

"I told you you'd drive him too far," cried Maiden, tearing off his coat. "Now some of you smart sellers just come on, and I'll kick the daylights out of him. Come, boys. If they want it give it to 'em."

But the animal men could not see the fun of facing such trained athletes, and one of them called out:

"We ain't got nothin' ag'in' you sellers. It's that cowardly lummox, Samuels, we want. He's nigh killed poor Frank, as didn't want to do nothin' but a little fun to him, cuss him! I kin whip him at a square fight any day. He took Frank foul, like the coward he is."

Samuels had dropped the ax, and stood eying his foes in a singular, doubtful way, as if struggling with himself.

Old Stevens pulled his sleeve and whispered:

"Keerful, Sammy. No temper."

Then the big man began to Maiden.

"It warn't my fault, gentlemen. I ain't no fighter; but I can't stand everything. I jest throwed Frisbie accidental like. I didn't mean to hurt him. I'll wrastle any of 'em, to show I don't bear malice."

"You will!" yelled one of the animal men, eagerly tearing off his coat. "You're my buckleberry, then. Come, boys, we've got the big lummox roused up, and we'll have some fun. Come on, you great calf."

"Go in and throw him, Samuels," said Maiden, angrily. "This has got to end. Now, boys, it's understood—no malice. Catch as catch can. Go in, both of you."

Ring men and animal men gathered in an amicable ring to witness the struggle, while the menagerie champion advanced in a way that showed he was a wrestler of no mean order, Samuels acting in a slow, clumsy manner, as if he was afraid of the other.

Nevertheless, when the men gripped at last there was a confusion of twining bodies, and the menagerie man was torn from his footing, tossed up like a baby, and dashed down on his back with a crash that knocked all the wind out of him, leaving him white as chalk and gasping for breath for more than a full minute.

The ring men applauded wildly, and Maiden called out tauntingly:

"How do you like our call now? Any more of you want the same medicin'? Guess you'll leave him alone now. He ain't no fighter, but—Lord have mercy! he kin jest wrastle fur stamps."

And so the animal men seemed to think, for they helped up Frank Frisbie, whose neck was all but dislocated, and took him away, while their second champion managed to rise and stammer:

"You threw me—fair—you're a good man."

Samuels helped support him, his usual listless, good-natured look coming back to him, as he answered kindly:

"I ain't got nothin' ag'in' you, Charley. I didn't want to hurt ye, nor Frisbie nuther, fur all ye was pickin' on me. All I want in this show is jest to be let alone—that's all. I'm willin' to call it square if you are."

Charley smiled faintly, and took his hand.

"You kin lick any man in the show if you're a mind to," he said. "I ain't no hog. I've got enough, and I reckon the boys has."

And so it appeared; for from that day Samuels became the most popular man in the show, and no one dared to molest him among the canvas men and others.

R-port exaggerated his prowess as it bad his cowardice, and from being the butt of the crowd he became the favorite.

And one thing was noticeable about him, that no one seemed jealous of him.

He was so quiet and peaceable that no person thought of calling him the champion at anything but wrestling, where his superiority was attributed to his strength solely, for it was not thought that skill had anything to do with it.

So the show went onward in its prosperous career till it reached Chicago, where, one day, Stevens said to Samuels secretly:

"That 'ere matter betwixt Maiden and Lil comes off to-morrow. May's to decide it. I heern 'em talkin' of it in the dressin' room. The gal's kinder thoughtful over it. I reckon she don't know herself how she feels, only I judge she's fond of Maiden."

"Whv, Steve?"

"She's waited till Cola's gone off ahead to do some work. He ain't to be back till two days, and he's took Harry with him. Won't be no catapult act till he's back. That looks as if the gal wanted the man."

Samuels sighed slightly.

"I suppose she does. He's a handsome fellow, and not bad, as ring men run. I don't know why I feel an interest in that child, except that she's so young and fresh. She's nothing to me, like Maggie."

"Why, what's Mag to you?" asked Stevens, in a tone of some curiosity.

Samuels hesitated before answering.

"Steve, it's as I thought; she is Maggie South. She told me so herself, and I've seen the little scar I made when we were children—apprentices in the same show."

Stevens looked alarmed.

"You hain't told her, boy! Wimmin is sich tattlers. You hain't told her!"

"Not a word. She doesn't know who I am. I suppose plenty of people know her by her true name, and she thought of me only as a show hanger-on, a canvas man, or something of the kind. But she's a good girl, Steve—a good girl. I watch her closely."

"So do I, boy," said Steve dryly. "I reckon I know what's the matter with you, Sammy."

Samuels colored through the stain that covered his face and neck.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Never mind, Sammy, it's all right. I ain't sayin' a word ag'in' Mag. She's a good gal, and I like her fust-rate. But we didn't come here on the mash, Sammy and don't you forget it. We come here to punish the most consarned varmint that ever killed a man crooked, and don't you go to thinkin' 'bout Mag or Lil, or any other gal, till you've got Cola' where you want him. You hain't much time now. It's late in August and we put up in October. The fight's to be in November, and we're gettin' near the place now."

Samuels nodded gloomily.

"I know it all. Sometimes I wish I hadn't got to fight. I've no malice against the man, and I know I shall have to hurt him badly. It's a great deal of money; it will make me a rich man with what I have now; but if it were not for keeping in practice to punish that other man, like a man, I think I'd pay forfeit and drop it."

Steve looked horrified.

"Sammy I'm ashamed of ye. What would all your backers say if they heard ye talk!"

"I don't know and I don't care; God made me strong, and I know I can beat them all; but He gave me brains, besides, and I'm not using them, Steve. I'm tired of this way of living."

"It ain't fur lo g, boy, not fur long. Say, I want to tell you something."

"What is it?"

"Do you want to hear all that goes on when Lil and Jack Maiden puts the thing before May?"

"Yes, certainly. Can I?"

His tone was eager, and the old carpenter grinned as he answered:

"It's to be in the private office, and old Newgate won't be there. I'll put ye under his desk if ye like. No one never goes there and you kin get out by goin' under the tent flap. No one knows it but me, and they don't mind old Pop."

Samuels looked thoughtful as he said:

"I don't like to sneak, Steve, but I confess I have a strange interest in this girl, though I don't care for her as I do for Maggie. I think I'll come."

CHAPTER XVI.

LOVE IN THE SHOW BUSINESS.

It was about half-past twelve at the show, most of the people at dinner, when Mr May, silent and grim as usual, walked to a small tent in the rear of the huge marquee, and said to old Stevens, who was fixing up some berches.

"I expect some people in here; Jack Maiden and the Corinne girls. Don't let any one else come within hearing. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Steve promptly.

May went into the small tent, which was used for a private office, and sat down at a desk, where he began to look over some accounts; for he was a man of economy in time.

On the other side of the tent stood Newgate's huge desk, but Newgate was away, and May lighted a cigar, muttering:

"Confound these mashes! Why can't they attend to their business, or take their love troubles to some one else?"

Then he buried his nose in the accounts, forgetting everything else, till a gentle cough behind him reminded him that his visitors had arrived.

He kept on without noticing them, till he had checked the item, and then knocked the ash off his cigar, and turned round his grim, forbidding face, surveying the party from head to foot, without a smile.

There was Jack Maiden, the leaper, in his best clothes, handsome and stalwart, fingering his hat bashfully, and smiling as if to propitiate the stern advance manager.

Beside him, with arms round each other, were Maggie and Lily, well dressed and lady-like.

Lily was rather pale and frightened, huddling close to her elder, whose face had a fond, protecting look about it, that became her well.

May drew in the smoke from his cigar, and

wheeled his chair round, before he said a word, when he let drop:

"Well! What's the matter? You wanted to see me. What do you want?"

Jack turned red and nudged Maggie, who favored him with a scornful glance, but made no reply, and May went on:

"Come. My time's worth money. What do you want? Is it a strike? More salary?"

"No, sir, no, sir," burst out Jack. "The show's going bully, sir, and we ain't complaining, none of us. Are we, Mag?"

Maggie curled her lip as she retorted.

"Why don't you say what you want?"

May nodded approvingly.

"You've more sense than all the rest put together. What does he want?"

"That's not for me to say," she replied. "I don't want anything of him. Let him ask for himself. He doesn't want me."

May's countenance remained like iron, though he was a man, like all showmen, who had a keen appreciation of humor, and enjoyed it, in his silent fashion, excessively.

"What is it, Jack?" he asked, briskly. "Do you want to leave the show?"

"Leave the show?" echoed Jack, aghast. "Why, who said a word about leavin' the show? Lord, Mr. May, don't you think I know when I'm well off? Good board, Saturday night just as reg'lar as clock-work. No, sir, I don't leave the Flatfoot Party, while they want me—and don't you forget it."

May puffed out a volume of smoke, looked at his watch, and said shortly:

"Jack, you're an idiot."

"Yes, sir; I know it, sir. Reckon it's too much jumping, sir," said Jack, submissively.

"But I think you understand plain English when you hear it spoken," pursued May.

"Hope, so, sir."

"Very well, then. If you won't tell me what you want in ten seconds out you go. One, two, three, four, five, six—"

"I WANT TO GET MARRIED!" roared Jack, in the extremity of his terror, in such a tone that even the iron-faced May relaxed into a frosty smile, as he put back his watch.

"Whom do you want to marry?" asked he, in the same cold tone as ever.

"Lil, here. She says as how she'd have me, if you said 'twas all right, sir."

May turned round and stared at the girl, as if she had been a curious animal.

"What have I to do with your getting married?" he asked slowly. "Who put you up to it?"

Lily had turned crimson, and could only nudge her sister imploringly.

Maggie spoke quite calmly.

"I recommended her to do it, sir."

May transferred his stern regard to her.

"You did, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

She did not tremble a bit, though every one in the show was afraid of May's sarcastic ways and iron will.

He looked at her in his most forbidding manner for several seconds, and then asked slowly:

"And what made you suppose I would have anything to do with a matter of this kind? Is it my business?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

His face never moved a muscle as he asked the question sternly; and the girl's bosom began to heave, as she said:

"Because—because—I thought—there was one honest man in this show."

And with that she also began to tremble.

A slight spasm crossed May's face, as he said in a gentler tone:

"Don't excite yourself. Be quiet. This is the business-office. No noise. Now tell me why you thought me the ONE."

Maggie calmed herself by a violent effort; but two large tears rolled down her cheeks, as she answered in a low tone:

"Because you are the only man in this show, except Samuels, that has never presumed on our helpless position to try and insult us."

May closed his stern lips and dropped the cigar from his hand, as he said bluntly:

"Thank you. Who's Samuels?"

"Our helper, sir, who rigs the wires."

"Hem! Well now, go on, go on. What do you want? Advice?"

"Please, sir, yes," said Maggie more boldly. "We know nothing of the world more than two children. We're only 'prentices. We see nothing. You're out, all the time. Ought Lily to marry Jack Maiden?"

May turned again, and scanned the pair in his searching way.

Jack looked like a fool, handsome as he was, and Lily looked what she was—unfit to face reality.

"Well," he said, slowly, "I see no objection, if they like each other well enough. I believe in people marrying in their own walk of life. How is it, Lily—do you want to marry Jack?"

Lily twisted her handkerchief, and pouted.

"I don't know," she said, shortly.

May actually smiled at last.

"You don't know? But you'll have to know,

one way or the other, child. It depends on you."

Lily twisted her handkerchief harder, and cast little angry glances at Jack as she spoke:

"I don't know. Sometimes I think I do—then I think I don't. He teased me, and I said yes, just to get rid of him."

May laughed outright.

"To get rid of him? Why, that's the way to have him tied to you for good, child!"

"No, it ain't," said Lily, shortly. "Pierrelli never goes near Madam, except to fight, and no one ever sees Mrs. Hooper or Mrs. Newgate near their husbands. And pa's got a wife somewhere else, I don't know where. I suppose Jack would be the same as the rest."

May turned to Jack.

"How's this? Are you fond of this lady?"

Jack stammered half-angrily:

"Yes, sir—certainly—of course I am, or I wouldn't be here, would I?"

May eyed him like a hawk.

"I don't know. That's for you to judge; not me. This lady draws treble the salary you do from the show."

Maggie squeezed her sister's arm, and May continued in his cold way:

"You may be after her salary—not her; and mean to drink it up and live on it in idleness. I've known such cases—"

"Lord, Mr. May, you don't think I'm a man like that!" protested Jack.

May cut him short.

"Of course not. It will be your place to take care of your wife—not hers to work for you. She'll have to leave the wire-act after she's married, of course. You've got enough to support a wife comfortably, and bring up a family, like a respectable man. You don't want your wife risking her life night after night, for all the world to look at."

Jack began to turn his hat round in his hands, and talk rapidly:

"I don't see why not, Mr. May? I ain't got your book-learning to talk, but I don't see why we should both have to live off forty dollars a week, when we might get more'n a hundred, and twice as much next year. Where's the sense of that? I don't see why I should do all the work, and she live like a lady. What's she to do?"

"Stay home, and nurse the babies—if you have any," said May, promptly. "That's a woman's place."

"That's all right enough," retorted Jack; "but s'posin' we don't have no babies, what then? No, sir; I ain't a-goin' to give that up. Besides, she's got a contract with this show. You don't want her to break that, if she marries me, do you? I put it to you, Mr. May. Is that square to you?"

"Of course," said May, quietly, "your wedding couldn't take place till the end of the season, or if it did now, we should continue to pay over your wife's salary to Mr. Cola, as before."

Jack Maiden looked at him stupidly:

"What's that, sir? I don't understand."

"I mean that Lily is only a 'prentice, and won't be out of her time for two years—so Cola tells me. She's under contract to us, through Cola, and he draws her salary."

As the advance manager spoke, he watched the girls furtively, and saw that they had their eyes intently fixed on Jack, who was so absorbed he did not notice them, as he eagerly answered:

"Yes; that's all very well, Mr. May, but I ain't no fool neither, and I've been to a lawyer, and he tells me if the gal's married, I can tell old Cola to go to grass. He ain't got no more control over her."

May smiled faintly.

"That's perfectly true. But you forgot one thing."

"And what's that?"

"That he's her guardian, and she ought not to marry without his consent."

Jack snapped his fingers excitedly.

"That fur his consent! We ain't in Roosha. I kin get her to come with me on the quiet, any night we choose; and then it's good-by, Cola, ketch us if you kin. Lil's seventeen, and we kin find lots of parsons to marry us. Can't we Lil, hey?"

May resumed his cigar, and puffed a cloud before he answered:

"That's all true too. You might marry her by an elopement, if she was fool enough to run away with a man like you, who seems to care more for the money than herself, but you forget another thing."

"And what's that, sir?"

Jack was white with excitement now, and kept putting on and pulling off his hat, quite forgetting where he was. May watched him as he might a new performance, criticising every movement, as he answered:

"That in America a wife has exclusive control of her own property, and would choose her own agent for making new contracts. As far as we were concerned, we should pay Mr. Cola till the end of this season. After that, your wife could choose whom she pleased, as her agent for new contracts."

"And she'd choose me—wouldn't you Lil?"

the acrobat asked eagerly, turning to her and

eying the girl hungrily. "I'd be your agent, wouldn't I?"

Maggie squeezed her arm, and Lily answered in a low tone, almost a whisper:

"Oh no, Jack. Pa has taken care of me so long, and he's been so good. He'd have to make all my contracts for next year, anyway."

"Then, by gum, he kin keep you and the darned contracts together," cried Jack ferociously ramming on his hat. "I won't marry you unless I'm fit to be trusted to make your contracts."

Both girls started up together in arms.

"Then I won't marry you at all," cried Lily, bursting into angry tears. "You don't care for me a bit, Jack. You just want to live on me, like that little wretch Pierrelli does on his wife. You're a mean—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Jack, all his handsome looks vanishing in vulgar selfishness, as he ground his teeth and stamped on the floor. "Who the dooce cares what you think! You ought to be glad to get any man to marry you. He's a-doin' you an honor, he is! You! Who'd marry you anyway? Notthin' but a gal in tights. I'm done! Good-day!"

And he dashed out, leaving the girls clinging to each other, the little one shrinking under each bitter word, like at the cut of a whip, the elder holding her arms around her, as if to shield her. When all was quiet, May sat smoking as if nothing had happened, till Maggie said:

"Thank you, sir. I'm sorry we troubled you so much. It's her second lesson. God knows I've had them, often enough. Good-day, sir. Come, Lily dear."

May had been watching them like a cat; and, as he saw them about to go, noticed that Lily was hardly able to stand.

"Stop," he said abruptly. "Here, you, both of you, sit down here till you've got over it. There are seats behind Mr. Newgate's desk. When you're quiet, and your eyes are all right, go. I've got some writing to do. Excuse me."

He turned his back and resumed his accounts, while Maggie took Lily behind the big desk, and he could bear her whispering consolation and counsel to the younger girl, till his attention was attracted by a slight exclamation from Lily, instantly checked by Maggie, who had clapped her hand over her companion's mouth, as he turned round to see.

"What's the matter?" he asked gruffly.

"Ob nothing, sir," said Maggie quietly, "only a mouse ran from under the desk, and this silly child was afraid. We'd better go away now, sir, so we won't disturb you."

"Ay, do," he said; for he saw that Lily was calm again, and then he buried himself in his figures, while they went out, after a great rustling and whispering, to which he paid no attention.

When they were gone he puffed the stump of his cigar till it burnt his lips, and threw it down, with the muttered observation:

"They're all alike. Confounded mean skunks."

I'll bounce Jack Maiden next season. But that Mag would make any man a good wife, don't care if it was John May himself. Only a gal in tights! What's he? Bah! Hooper's no worse than the rest, after all."

He put up his wallet of accounts, buttoned his coat, and sallied out, saying to Stevens:

"That's all. Much obliged."

And so went off, and was no more seen.

As soon as he was gone old Steve went into the office tent, and called softly:

"Sammy! Are ye there?"

There was no answer, and he went to look under Newgate's desk, but found no one there.

The flap of the tent had been disturbed, and a peg pulled out and replaced loosely, from which he judged that his friend must have escaped unseen.

He went back, put away his tools, and went to dinner at the cheap hotel where the bands boarded, finding Samuels at dinner before him, looking pale and gloomy.

"Well, boy," he whispered, taking his seat by him, "did ye do it?"

Samuels nodded, but said nothing till his friend had finished dinner, and they were strolling back to the show.

Then he observed:

"Steve, those girls have a hard life."

"I don't see why. They've easy work, good pay, and all the world's wild after them."

"That's not it."

"What's up then, Sammy?"

"Steve, I swear if that girl Lily was my sister, I'd go and break every bone in Jack Maiden's body."

He spoke without a trace of anger, but his face wore a stern, pitiless look that became it much better than its ordinary sleepy expression.

Steve stared at him in wonder.

"What's happened? Is the match off?"

"Off? Yes. It ought never to have been on."

He only wanted her money."

"I told ye so," returned Steve, dryly. "She didn't know it, or leastwise didn't want to know it; but, bless ye, I dropped on it from the fast. He's been blowing 'bout it ever so long, what he was goin' to do."

"What, Stevens? What did he say?"

"Lordy! He was going to come Cola over them, and be a manager; darned if he warn't, Sammy. They all know Cola used to walk the wire, and be a general man; and they see him a-struttin' round now, doing nothing, but live on other folks's acts, calling 'em 'prentices, and gettin' a hundred a week fur each. The darned fools thinks they kin do the same, and Jack thought he'd begin with his wife, like Pierrelli, the little skunk."

"Well, wby shouldn't he, if she was fool enough to let him?"

"That's jest it, Sammy. It takes brains to fool a woman, and Cola nor Pierrelli ain't no man's fools, you bet. Jack Maiden! Phew!"

The old man uttered a whistle of intense contempt at the idea of Jack pretending to have any brains, and walked on, while Samuels observed:

"Something else happened, Steve."

"What, boy?"

"The girls caught me under the desk."

Stevens looked scared.

"Did they let on to May? They didn't say a word to me."

"They kept my secret. Lily screamed, but Mag stopped her, and swore it was a mouse. I slipped out, and they made a great whispering and rustling on purpose to hide my retreat."

Stevens listened thoughtfully, and uttered a low whistle when Samuels had finished.

He made no remark till they got near the show, when he said:

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know, Steve."

"Hem! I don't see what ye kin do."

"Nor I. I never felt so utterly mean in all my life."

"Mean! What about?"

"Listening. She must despise me."

"Well, that won't kill ya. Hard feelin's don't break no bones, Sammy. Nary bone."

"Ah, it's all very well for you, Steve. You're old. You've forgotten how a young man feels."

Stevens gave a dry sniff.

"So you think. Mebbe I've lost my memory."

"No, I don't mean that. Forgive me; but—"

"But—but. Sammy, I'm ashamed of ye, arter my trainin'. Twenty year I've worked at you, to make you fit to face the champion; and you kin whip any man in the world, any way he wants it. And here you are a-whinin' like a sick babby because a gal looks cross-eyed at yer. S'pose she does despise ye, as ye say—hain't you got to pound her dad to a jelly, anyway? and you don't think there's any way she kin get to like you. Keep away from her. She ain't fur you."

Samuels hung his head. The old man's homely counsel was wise, and he knew it. But the human heart in youth cannot always be ruled by wisdom.

"Steve," he said, presently, "I love that girl. It's no use. I've tried to fight it off. I've tried to hate them all. I can't. I love them all three. It makes me feel like a mean hound when I look at little Harry, so brave and gentle, and know that I came here on purpose to kill his father. They all love Cola. There must be something in the man or they wouldn't. I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think I'll leave it all and go to my fighting in an open, manly way, instead of hiding it and double-banking these poor fellows, like Frisbie. I near killed him, and I've felt sorry ever since. And here's Maggie. I love her. I can't help it. I'm going to make a clean breast of it to her. By heaven! I can't stand it any longer."

Stevens listened to him unmoved, and uttered a slight sigh as he answered:

"I might have known it, boy. I might have known it. Twenty year goes fur nothin' when a woman comes into the case. I s'pose ye'll be wantin' to marry Mag and askin' a blessin' from the man who murdered yer father, out of pure jealous spite and villainy. Do it if ye wanter; but by the Etarnal—"

The old man's eyes flashed fire as he ground out the words:

"I'll know ye've lost yer grip. I hain't nothin' to do with traitors."

He turned away and went into the show, but Samuels followed him and said, pleadingly:

"Don't be too hard on me, Steve. You've been more than a father to me. I know it, but—"

"But ye've gone back on me, and on your murdered father too!" retorted the old man, savagely. "Have yer own way. I'm done."

He took up his tools and began to work furiously, when Samuels laid his hand on the old man's arm.

"Steve," he said, "listen one moment."

"I hear," was the cold reply.

"You are mistaken in me. I do not—not want to spare Cola. I'm going to beat him within an inch of his life, but I cannot kill him—that's all. And I must see Maggie now. I must."

"Why?" asked Steve, still more coldly.

"To find where my mother is buried," said Samuels, softly. "You don't grudge me that?"

Stevens went on working, but his face softened slightly.

"Consider another thing," pursued Samuels. "She is not Cola's daughter, and I don't think Lily is either."

"What's that got to do with it? She's in the same boat with him. You don't want nothin' to do with her."

"Steve, I can't help it—I must speak to her somehow. I must explain to her who I am. If she's the old Maggie of twenty years ago, she's true as steel. She'll never betray me. Sink or swim, I speak to her."

CHAPTER XVII.

TROUBLE IN THE OFFICE

BUT Samuels was not destined to have his interview with Maggie, much as he desired it, for some time to come.

The girl was not "on" that day, and Lily greeted him with a look of contempt when he offered to help her out of the net at the afternoon performance.

"No," she said, sharply, "I don't want your help. You're a mean sneak! There!"

He offered no remonstrance, and appeared as if he had not heard her.

In the evening he was at his post as usual, but did not offer his hand, when the girl said, as she got out of the net alone:

"I expected better things of you. I didn't think you, of all men, would have sneaked."

Again he made no answer, and she went off with Maggie.

Samuels had been in the habit of seeing them to the hotel after the evening show, as a regular thing; and he went to the door as usual and took his place there to wait.

They passed out beside him, and Lily shot an angry glance at him, while Maggie kept her head averted.

None in the show suspected anything wrong, and the two girls paused an instant at the doorway after passing him.

He heard them whispering together, and his heart throbbed with expectation, when Maggie suddenly observed:

"No, Lily. It's not our fault. If we are insulted, it will be because there's no man in the show with spirit to take care of us. I'm going on, no matter who follows."

She took Lily's arm and went out into the dark streets, Samuels following without a moment's hesitation.

His figure had lost its usual slouching air, and he walked more erect than was his habit in the show, keeping a little in rear of the two girls.

In this manner he followed them to the hotel: and as they entered the door, he turned and went back, without exchanging a word with either, but he could not help uttering a slight sigh.

The next day, Cola came back with Harry, looking unusually placid and smiling, and Samuels realized that his opportunity was gone.

When Maggie went on in her turn, she behaved very differently from Lily.

She took his hand as if nothing had happened, but kept her head slightly averted, and said not a single word at the afternoon show.

In the evening, Cola being at the box-office, she gave Samuels a single look, as if she had never seen him before, or more as if he were a block of wood, and the cold contempt expressed in the glance cut him so deeply that he flushed under the stain that covered his face, and fell back.

But for all that, he was at his place at the door, after the catapult act, ready to see the girls home.

He saw them speak to Cola, as if asking him to accompany them, but Cola said aloud:

"No; I've no time. Let Samuels do it. I'm busy this evening."

Then they marched out past Samuels, without casting a glance his way, and he followed them like a servant, till they again came to the hotel, where they went in as disdainfully as on the previous night.

Samuels went back to the show, to find Stevens, and said to him quietly:

"You were right, and I was wrong. I shall not try to speak to her any more. They both despise me, and they are right."

There had been a coolness between the two men ever since their quarrel, but the old carpenter's face brightened at once when the younger man spoke, and he rejoined:

"Let 'em scowl as much as they please. Hard feelin's don't break no bones, Sammy. Say, did ye hear the news?"

"What news?"

"There's a rumpus in the office."

"What about?"

"Old Hooper. Somethin's goin' on, and I reckon Cola's into a muss. I seen 'em all with their heads together and they've sent for May, though he's on ahead."

Samuels shrugged his shoulders.

"That don't concern us. Do you know anything about the cause?"

"Reckon I do," said Stevens, dryly.

"What is it?"

"Reckon there's a new deal fur next season, and the show's going to change hands."

"What makes you think so?"

"They're goin' to have a meetin' to-night, all the partners, arter the show, at the hotel, while the boys is busy packin' up. I'd like to hear what's said, Sammy."

Samuels shook his head decidedly.

"No more spying for me. Let them do what they like. It won't affect us."

That night, as Stevens had said would be the case, there was a concclave at the Palmer House of the partners, at which Mr. Abrams, the third member of the "Flatfoot" party, who had hitherto had charge of the transportation of the show, came out in a new character as the orator of the evening, while May and Newgate sat silent as fishes, and Mr. Meriden, who had come on from Madison, officiated as the representative of the great Hooper, who was still absent in Europe.

Mr. Abrams was a tall, bony man, with the sinews of an athlete. He had once been a four-horse rider, and was reputed to know more about elephants than any man in the show business.

Mr. Meriden was as tall as Mr. Abrams, but had a faded, dyspeptic appearance, suggestive of a bilious bread-paper. He had a subdued, rather furtive look, born of the long course of snubbings he had endured from the great Hooper.

"Look a here, gentlemen," said Mr. Abrams, energetically, "Hooper's running this thing into the ground. Here he's dipping us into all sorts of crazy expenses, and not doing a thing to help us, while we're working like niggers to show a good balance for him at the end of the season. What's this new kink he's got in his head about elephants? We've got elephants enough eating their blamed heads off, and now he wants another."

"But this one's a rouser," interposed Cola. "He's the most famous beast in the world. Every one's beard of Bingo."

"Bingo be blowed," retorted Abrams, rather disdainfully. "What do we want of British elephants, when we've got just as good in Yankeeland? Is it to catch the guys? We've got 'em now. Is it to work the papers? We've got them, too, solid. What Sterne don't do in one town, Jim Frazer does, and what Jim don't do, Sterne does. We couldn't get better notices. Don't they put in everything we want? We hadn't dropped a cent on any town in the route, and that's more than any show can say that ever I traveled with. And now he wants us to spend thirty thousand dollars for a brute that won't draw no more than the rest. I say we don't do it. What's this I hear about old Mrs. Hooper bein' sick, Meriden?"

"Mrs. Hooper is not only sick," said Meriden, gravely, "but I don't expect to find her alive when I get back. I've telegraphed him, but he only sends back word to spare no expense in doctors. He don't say a word about coming."

"He isn't as sick as when he started, is he?" asked Cola.

"Oh, no, sir. He writes me that he has gained forty pounds, and feels as well as ever."

"Then I say he ought to be sent for," said Abrams, doggedly. "You sellers can do what you please, but I've been in the show business jest as long as Hooper, and I believe in holding on to a paying business when you've got it, and not going hunting for expensive jakes like Bingo. He won't draw what he costs."

Here came a tap at the door, and a boy looked in.

"Telegram for Mr. Meriden. Which of you gents is it? A dollar to collect, please."

Meriden paid it with a wry face, opened the envelope and read aloud:

"Mrs. Hooper died at nine. Have not fled. He answers: 'Embalmed. Coming.' What shall I do?"

SILAS JAMES, M.D.

"There, gentlemen," said the factotum. "That will bring him back, sure. I shall have to take the next train East."

There was a short silence in the room, and then May observed:

"Poor woman! She's better off."

Newgate glanced quickly at him, but said nothing, and Cola said musingly:

"You ought to be able to use it to advantage in the notices, you and Sterne. Work the sympathy racket. It pays."

No one answered him; but old Abrams flushed slightly through his bronzed face, and said rather sharply:

"Never was a better woman than Faith Hooper. I remember, when I was riding, I had a bad fall one time, owing to the off nag going false, and that woman nursed me as if I'd been her own brother. Tell ye what it is, gentlemen, one of us ought to go and see her buried decent."

"I'll see your place is filled while you're gone," said Newgate, speaking for the first time. "I wish I could go myself, Abrams: but you know I can't leave. Mr. Cola will attend to matters while you're away."

"Mr. Cola's got business of his own," retorted that gentleman, coldly. "If you want to mix up business and sentiment, hoe your own row."

"All right," returned Abrams, rather hotly. "I'm agreeable, if you are. I can trust Sam Jackson. I'll go with you, Meriden."

Champion Sam.

They left the room together; and Cola, with a sneer, observed to May:

"I think this sympathy business is played out. Hooper would cut all our throats if he could, and I'm not going to put on airs about it. As for Bingo, I think he's a good card."

"Do you?" was all May replied, and then a dead silence reigned between the three, till Newgate, threw away his cigar, and said to May:

"Come. It's settled. I guess we've got to stand it this season. We'll see in the fall."

He left the room, and May followed him, leaving Cola alone.

That gentleman cogitated awhile, and then muttered to himself:

"I wonder why Gittuppe didn't come."

He left the room in his turn, and went in search of the remaining partner in the show, and discovered that he had not been seen all the evening, having gone off after the show with a lady who rode in the opening cavalcade of the performance.

He did not see him till next day, when the two stayed together a good deal and held a long conference, which resulted in Cola taking another secret expedition of three days more, not rejoining the show till it was out in the State of Missouri.

During this time Samuels continued at his duties in the acts in which he assisted, not saying a word to either of the girls. The third time that Lily went on she held out her hand to him, to be assisted out of the net, and said, sarcastically:

"You needn't put on airs, I'm sure. Give me your hand. I can't get out alone."

He obeyed silently, and from that time things went smoothly, except that the girls never spoke to him; but by degrees they ceased to cast angry glances his way.

Old Stevens managed to be near whenever a performance went on, and watched the parties closely.

One day he said to Samuels:

"Sammy, my boy, them gals is weakenin'."

"Indeed?" was the listless reply.

"Yes. I heerd 'em talkin' in the dressin'-room. They don't know that me and you is friends. I heerd Lil say to Mag she was sorry for ye, and couldn't hold out without makin' up."

"And what did Maggie say?" asked Samuels, eagerly, his eyes sparkling.

"She said it didn't matter much; it were only another man gone like the rest. But I noticed the kinder sighed when she said it, and looked sorrowful like. Sammy, my boy, wimmin's all alike. I know 'em. I'm afeared that gal's as sweet on you, as you be on her."

"Why do you say afraid?" asked Samuels, in a sharp, excited tone.

"Because," said Stevens, gravely, "she ain't for you, Sammy, and what's more, she'll draw off, if ye have anything to do with her."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CORINNE'S FALL.

THE show had arrived at the borders of Texas, the first time in the memory of man that a company of such magnitude had entered that State.

Every one had heard horrible tales of the ferocity of the Texan cowboys; and the performers expected to see an audience of ruffians, bristling with revolvers and knives, and carrying repeating rifles over their knees.

Free fights and hecatombs of dead men were in the imaginations of the ladies, and several threatened to fall sick and be unable to appear when they entered the State.

What was their surprise to find that the show was crowded with quiet, respectable men and motherly women, all rather silent and hard to move to applause, while the lower benches were full of negroes, and not a single drunken man made his appearance in the marquee.

The only revolver found anywhere near the show was on the person of Tom Brown, head canvas man of the International, and the marshal took it away from him, and fined him fifty dollars for carrying it.

Texas was on its mettle to preserve order, and at every town they entered was a marshal and strong posse of armed officers, who picketed the roads leading into the town, and disarmed every cowboy that rode in before allowing him to pass.

Another strong posse was at the tent, watching every man that entered; and, if a suspicion of inebriety was perceived on him, he was quietly warned off, and invariably took the hint and departed.

Once, when a man took in a private bottle, and waxed a little noisy before the show had begun, the marshal called out, in his sharp, cold way:

"Six of you freedmen there: You, Tom, Pomp, Dick, Jeff, Julius and Si, just bounce that boozier. Do it lively, now."

Then up rose six big negroes, grabbed the noisy man suddenly by the arms and legs, one of them ramming a dirty cotton handkerchief into his mouth to prevent any outcry, and be-

was snatched up and carried out like a log of wood, without any more fuss than if he had really been one.

When they got him outside, they shook him violently, and whirled him round till he began to feel terribly ill, when they left him on the grass, some distance off, to crawl home a sadder and sicker man than he had entered the show.

The really difficult riding-acts were exceedingly successful, witnessed as they were by a concourse of men who lived in the saddle; but Corinne and Pippa were the grand features of the performance, after the elephants.

The cowboys lost their grave, silent demeanor, got excited, and began to yell, when the girl was fired out of the cannon; and, when Pippa was thrown out of the catapult, one might have heard a pin drop, till the boy fell into the net and scrambled out, to bow and smile to the audience.

As soon as they realized that he was safe, the whole audience stood up and roared for an encore, till Cola was obliged to go into the ring and explain that the strain on the performer was so great that no man living could undergo it more than twice a day, and that he could not answer for the safety of his son if an encore were insisted on.

"If you want to see it again, gentlemen," he concluded, "come to the evening show. Mr. Pippa will then be rested, and able to repeat his unparalleled feat."

The speech quieted them, and Cola came out, smiling with intense pride, and rubbing his hands. It was a clear beat of the rest of the show, and Pierrelli looked green with envy at the success of his wife's rivals.

In the evening Samuels noticed that Maggie, when her turn came to perform, was very pale, and he heard her say to Cola:

"Pa, I'm not well enough to go on the wire. I'm afraid I shall fall. I'm dizzy."

Cola looked at her sourly.

"You know your contract," was all he answered. "Why didn't you get a doctor to certify that? It's your turn. Lily was on yesterday day."

"I know that, pa," said Lily herself, making her appearance, dressed for Corinne, "but I'm well, and Mag's sick. I'm ready to take her turn. She'll fall, if she goes on."

"Very well," said Cola dryly, "do as you please. I tell her to go on. If she refuses, you can take her place, that's all."

Samuels heard all, not appearing to listen; and the little delay at the door of the dressing-room made the people impatient; for they began to stamp, and clap their hands.

"Settle it quick. Don't keep the guys waiting," said Cola sharply; and Lily, with an angry glance at him, retorted:

"Very well, pa. I'll go."

As she spoke, she pushed Maggie inside, ran out to the ladder alone, tripped up the rounds amid thunders of applause, and took her place in the cannon.

Samuels saw she was angry and excited, and knew well that she was not as skillful as her sister. She had had several slight accidents on the road, owing to carelessness and over haste, and he felt nervous about her that night.

He knew that it was necessary for the girl to brace herself rigidly against the shock of the powerful spring in the mock cannon, and pay close attention to the word.

That night, she was looking round her, and he called to her, in a suppressed tone:

"Miss Lily, be careful!"

"Go on! I'm ready!" she answered sharply.

At that moment the spring was released, the powder flashed, and Lily was flung into the net, all in a heap, not having braced herself properly.

Samuels saw her scramble out, looking a little confused, and when she went to the wire he saw she was very pale, while a little streak of blood on one temple showed where she had been scratched by a knot in the net.

He instantly followed her, and said to Cola, who stood by the entrance:

"Miss Lily's hurt, sir. She'll fall. She ought not to go on the wire."

Cola turned on him savagely.

"When I ask your advice, speak. Go to your post, and attend to your work."

Samuels compressed his lips slightly and wheeled round. He saw the girl, at the foot of the sloping wire, pass her hand over her forehead, then set her teeth close and begin the ascent.

The hush in the audience became intense. Even the green Texans saw that something had happened, and that the girl was in pain, and would have hard work to get through her task.

Twice she slipped on the ascent, but recovered herself, and at last stood on the lofty wire, close under the roof of the tent, Samuels walking underneath her at every step, his face pale under its stain, a firm compression of his lips telling that he expected an accident, and was ready to do his part to avert it.

And the accident came before the girl got to the place over the net.

He saw her make a misstep; fall off the wire; catch under one knee, with the instinct of long

training; then came a wild shriek from the girl, echoed by a groan from all over the house, and Lily fell from the wire, nearly forty-five feet above the earthen floor of the ring.

Women shrieked and fainted, men turned sick and averted their eyes, others stared as if fascinated, and then came an intense silence, as they watched the fall.

Right under the falling girl stood a big, powerful fellow, in the dress of a workingman, and they saw him catch her and go down in a heap, with her in his arms. Then came a rustling over seats, a confusion of wild cries and shrieks, while the ring filled with people in instant.

Cola rushed out on the music platform, and roared out:

"Get back to your seats, please, all. It is only a common accident. No one is hurt."

He was answered by a confusion of cries from the wild cowboys, who fancied he was deceiving them; but, a moment later, arose a great cheering in the ring, and the people began to run back to their seats, while a line of the marshal's constables cleared the space, leaving in the center a group every one could see.

The big workingman was standing up, and he had his arm round the girl, who was standing on her feet and trying to kiss her hand to the crowd, to assure them she was not hurt.

Those who had opera-glasses could see that she was trembling violently, and had to be held up by the big man, who, in his turn, was partially supported by one of the hands, who stood behind him, an old white-headed carpenter, with one hand on the big man's shoulder.

"Rest a bit, Sammy," said old Stevens coolly. "Don't try to walk. How d'ye feel, Miss Lily? Hurt much?"

The girl was ghastly pale; but she tried to smile as she said faintly:

"I think not, Poppy. Only shaken. I'm dizzy; that's all. Where's pa?"

"Here he comes, miss," said Stevens; and Cola, in full evening dress, walked across the ring to them, saying in a low tone:

"Are you hurt, Lil? Is it bad? Can you walk at all?"

"I'll try, pa," she said faintly. "I'm not hurt. It's Samuels."

Cola glanced at the man coldly, took his daughter's arm, and said to her:

"Come. We must get you out."

He then turned round to the people, who were now hushed and expectant:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "Corinne is not hurt, but much shaken up. With your permission, she will ask to be excused from the rest of her act."

He was answered by vigorous clapping, in the midst of which he led Lily out, the girl shrinking at every step, but managing to get to the dressing-room, where Maggie took her in her arms and carried her inside.

As for Samuels, he said to Stevens:

"That was a pretty hard shock. Lucky the girl's a light weight. If it had been Maggie, I think I should have broken both arms."

"Are ye hurt bad, boy?" muttered Stevens, anxiously, as they walked across the ring, Samuels moving slowly.

"I think not," was the low reply. "It was a heavy stock; but I gave to it; I'll be all right to-morrow, but I can't put much force on winding up the catapult to-night."

"He won't make ye do it, surely," said Stevens agast at the idea.

"You don't know him. He will."

And, sure enough, when the time came for the catapult act, Samuels stood by his place and said to Cola:

"I can't put much strength on to-night, sir. Hope some one will help."

Cola looked at him from head to foot with an evil sort of sneer, as he answered:

"You get your pay every Saturday, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," responded Samuels.

"You're paid to stretch the wires, look to the nets and wind up the catapult. Go ahead and do it."

He turned his back and walked off, while Samuels drew up his usual slouchy figure and locked after him with a singular light in his brown eyes.

He said nothing, however, but went to his work of winding up the catapult, all the time who usually hung around watching him furiously, till Frank Fribbie suddenly strode out, and pushed Samuels away with the ruff remark:

"Here, I'll do that. By gosh, you ain't fit to do no work to-night. Gawd darn his Jew skin to th'under, he ain't fit to carry a load of muck to a bear."

Samuels made no resistance, and the big animal man wound up the catapult, and then stood on one side, as little Harry Cola came out of his dressing-room to do his act.

The boy went up to Samuels, his eyes full of tears, and wrung his hand.

"Samuels," he said, "you've saved my sister's life. God bless you. Don't think hard of the governor. He's not as bad as he seems. Give the word. I'll trust my life to Fribbie. He knows how to obey orders."

Fribbie nodded. "I said nothing as he took up the mallet, and the boy got into his place

and was flung into the air on his terrible flight with perfect precision, without Samuels lifting a finger.

When the act was over, the young man went to the door as usual to wait for the girls, and saw Cola, who said to him coldly:

"You can go home and rest. You're not wanted any more to-night."

Samuels gave him a peculiar glance, and answered, as he went out:

"Thank you for the permission, Mr. Cola."

Then he went off down the street to the hotel where the hands boarded, and was soon followed by old Stevens, who made him go to bed, after a very careful examination.

When it was over, the old man said dryly:

"After this, Sammy, let the gals catch themselves. You ain't hired to ketch 'em, and you hasn't got much thanks for it nuther."

Samuels nodded thoughtfully.

"I can't help thinking," he said, in a low tone, "that Cola was sorry I saved the child. He as good as told me what you do now."

The old man rummaged in his valise for a bottle of some powerful liniment, with which he carefully rubbed the body of his friend, before he made any answer to the other's remark.

Then, apropos of nothing, he said:

"You're right, Sammy."

"What about?" asked the young man, in a tone of surprise.

"About his being sorry the gal were saved by you. Boy, I was watching him."

"Well, what of it?"

"Just this. I seen what you didn't."

"What was that?"

"His 'ao, when she fell."

"Well?"

"I was clo'et to him and I seen what were comin'. So did he."

"So, did I. I've been expecting it a long time."

"I reckon he wished the gal had killed you, or broken a bone, Sammy, and that's what's the matter. As you caught her, I seen him kinder smile when you dropped. I reckon he thought you'd saved the gal and got the wust of it."

"But why?"

"Sammy, it's my belief he suspects you, who you be. I'm goin' to find out."

"How?"

"By helpin' you to see Maggie."

He kept on rubbing in the liniment all the while he spoke, and went on:

"I was ag'in' it at fust; but mebbe it's the best now. It'll bring things to a head. There boy, you'll do now. I was feared you had a strain somewhere, but I reckon you'll be all right to morrow. Go to sleep."

The old man's prophecy was correct. The young and vigorous athlete woke up in the morning, free from bad traces of a shock that would have prostrated nine men out of every ten, and announced that he felt all right, save for a little stiffness in the muscles, familiar to all men who exercise hard.

Lily was a very light girl, not weighing over a hundred and five pounds; but her fall from a height of forty-five feet had given a shock of nearly a ton weight, only relieved by the skill of her catcher in yielding to the shock and falling with her.

"Now, Sammy, my boy," said old Stevens, "you don't want to be too spry about work no more, till you're all right. There's a pile of money laid on you in November, and it won't do to have no more sick accidents, or the champion will knock you out. You jest play off a little fur a week."

Accordingly, when Samuels went to the show he moved slowly and stiffly: said he wasn't able to wind up the catapult; got Frisbie to help him for a few days; and attracted sympathy throughout the show for his supposed injuries, while he quite deceived Cola, who appeared to be unusually kind both to him and the girls, owing to the energetic remonstrances of Harry Cola, who was the only person in the world for whom the callous manager entertained any real regard, if he really did for him.

Corinne was taken off the bills for two whole days as the show moved on; and the accident was commented on and magnified in the papers to a first-class sensation, to work up interest on her reappearance at San Antonio, where the tent was packed with curious ranchers at two dollars a head.

Maggie was the new Corinne, and had all the sympathy that attended her sister, while the people wondered at her grace and daring after such a tremendous fall.

It was all the same to them.

When the great show finally quitted the State of Texas, Mr. Newgate remarked to May:

"I didn't think much of Hooper's idea in coming here, and I'm glad we're out; but it's panned out better than I expected. We've taken in five thousand dollars a day, right along."

May figured a little in his memorandum-book before he answered:

"Then we shall divide; what do you say?"

Newgate wrote on a slip of paper the figures following:

SEASON OF '18—

ESTIMATE NET GAIN... \$350,000.00.

Hooper, 1-7	\$50,000.00
Gat uppe, 1-21	10,000.67
Cola, 1-21	16,000.66
Abrams, 4-21	10,000.66
Newgate, 4-7	10,000.00
May, 27	100,000.00
Total	\$350,000.00

May glanced over the figures, and remarked quietly:

"There's only one mistake I see."

"And what's that?" asked Newgate in a tone of some irritation, for he was a close accountant, and touchy on figures.

"Gittuppe's share," was the response. "It's mortgaged to us, you know."

Newgate smiled, with an air of relief.

"Is that all? I know that, but it don't go on the books. Besides, between you and me, we may want to use Gittuppe next season, under certain circumstances."

May curled his lip slightly.

"He's no good. His name's not worth a cent."

"Don't you believe it," interrupted Newgate. "He's a pretty fair figure-head to stand at a door, though he can't make a speech."

"But what do we want of him?"

"We may want him—"

Here Newgate went to the door, looked out, closed it, and came back to whisper:

"To buck against the old man!"

May evinced no symptoms of surprise. He only lighted a cigar, and said indifferently:

"That's no more than we might expect. Have you heard anything definite yet?"

"Yes; they've approached Sterne."

May smiled slightly.

"They didn't make much out of him."

"No. By the by, May, it's a curious thing—"

"What is?"

"That a showman should have a conscience."

"Not at all. They've all go; one somewhere; but they differ in character."

"Well, Sterne's got one. He actually sticks to his old friends. He's refused a good offer."

"How do you know?"

"From the man that made it."

"And who was that?"

"Jack Howard."

May smiled again.

"Newgate," he observed, "you stick too much in your office, and listen to too many people. Jack Howard didn't make him the offer at all."

"Who did then?" asked Newgate, sharply.

"Cola."

Newgate actually started.

"Cola. How do you know?"

"Heard him make it. Jack gave it to him, and he gave it to Sterne."

"Where?" asked Newgate.

"At Texarkana, in the hotel. Cola and Gittuppe think they've got in with the old man's party, and they're going to be left. He's going in with the Paris Show, and wants to steal our best man."

Newgate slowly and thoughtfully tore up the estimate he had been making, and tossed the pieces into the waste-basket, before he observed:

"May."

"Well."

"It's an infernal throat-cutting business, this."

"Very," was the laconic reply.

"How easy it would be, May—"

"Well, what?"

"To cook accounts at the end of the season, and get square."

May laughed.

"Very easy."

"I'll do it in a minute."

"I know it. But you wouldn't."

"How do you know, John May? I may be as big a rogue as any you ever saw, if you drive me into a corner."

May laughed again, a short, grim laugh.

"No, you couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because you've got something Hooper hasn't got, as you told him."

Newgate smiled faintly.

"You mean a conscience? I don't know, May. It's getting tough; and revenge is sweet."

May shook his head.

"You have a conscience, and he knows it, or he wouldn't leave matters in our hands as he does. He knows he'll get his share at the end of the season, and he'll trust to our honor, even while he's selling us out to the Paris fellows."

Newgate thoughtfully pulled out a cigar, and said:

"Give me a light, you old hypocrite."

May smiled and handed it to him, and the older man pursued:

"He hadn't even the conscience to come home to his wife's funeral, because his elephant bargain hung fire. Meriden writes me he won't be home till settling-up time. That'll fetch him, sure."

May puffed out a volume of smoke.

"Newgate, this is our last season on the road for some years, and don't you forget it."

"I don't know that," retorted Newgate. "It's our money runs this concern and we can set up just as good a one of our own, with Gittuppe for a figure-head."

May shook his head.

"Don't you believe it. You'll lose your cash and come to grief. Do you know where the trouble began?"

"No."

"Well, I do. It came of losing our heads once, and letting our hearts speak out. I tell you it don't do in the show business. It's the last time I ever do it. I'll stand by and let a man cut up his children into small bits in a business way, and I'll go on smoking. It's a throat-cutting business, and I'm out of it for good, after this trip."

Newgate seemed to be pondering something, for he presently said:

"What do you mean? I don't remember anything out of the way."

May laughed.

"Don't you remember the pious business at Madison, and how it covered three columns in the Statesman next day?"

Newgate nodded, with a look of disgust.

"I should say I did. I tell you what it is, May, I'm not a religious man, and don't pretend to be a saint; but I must say I never was so disgusted in my life. A man stepping out of the jaws of death, with one foot yet in the grave, wanting his hypocrisy and blasphemous cant at so much per column, special rates. I don't know which to loathe most, the man who uttered it, or the man who printed it."

May smoked on calmly, till the other had finished, when he removed his cigar to say:

"All true. Skip the rest. Well, we made a business mistake to tell him what we did. I'm the man to blame. I did it. I dubbed him the—"

He laughed at the recollection.

"THE GREATEST FRAUD ON EARTH!"

"Yes," he resumed, curling his lip, "he's all that; but I was a fool to tell him so. There's magic in a name, and his was worth a million. He wrote to Tombs and Warren that very evening, and closed a bargain."

"How do you know?" asked Newgate nervously.

May pulled out a letter and handed it to his partner.

"From Meriden. It seems the old man coaxed him not to tell, with a promise of the treasurership, and Meriden's found out that he's gone back on him, and appointed his son-in-law to the place. So Meriden's out of a job, next season, and he's willing to tell all he knows and more too."

Newgate looked carefully over the letter and then folded it up and handed it back.

"There's a big fight coming, May," he said in a very grave tone. "Somebody will go under next season, n, sure."

May smiled tranquilly as he put away the letter and answered:

"I know one party that will not go under, and people call them the Flatfoots. I can afford to take a trip to Europe as well as the next man till I'm wanted again."

Newgate looked more disturbed than was his wont as he answered:

"It's a great pity, a great pity. If he'd only acted square, we could have made twice as much next year. I know what's caught him. It's that confounded baby elephant, and the old fool thinks such a thing never was heard of before."

One day he would be apparently all kindness; the next harsh and insulting in tone, swearing at his quiet helper, and finding fault with everything he did, without any reason.

One day he said, in a sneering way:

"I guess you think you're pretty smart, since you downed Frisbie and Charley Smith, but I've got it in for you, when you least expect it, and you'll get struck stiff, so you won't know what hit you. I've knocked the stuffing out of better men than you."

Samuels made him no answer but to walk away, looking as if he expected to be struck; and Cola laughed sardonically, observing to Gittuppe, who was standing by:

"Got to keep those fellows in their places, you know, or they'll rise over you. He thinks he's a great man now, since that accident, but I'll take it out of him, pretty quick."

at the helper, and studiously avoided him; while even Harry Cola never exchanged a word with him, beyond the official "Ready!" and "Go!" when the catapult was wound up; and Cola stood by the machine then, his eyes fixed on Harry and Samuels, alternately, as if trying to detect any symptoms of an understanding that might exist between them.

During the day the helper never saw them, and suspicion lurked in every glance of Cola; the showman's suspicion of a rival in his own line.

Stevens came in for a share of this same suspicion, as he soon told his friend.

"Sammy, my boy," he said one day, when they were alone, "he's beginnin' to drop on us. I've see'd him, a-smellin' round the show like a old terrier at a rat-hole. He's be'n axin' all sorts of questions and found out that me and you's together most of the time. I think he's a-droppin' on us."

"Do you think he's certain?" asked Samuels, a singular light in his brown eyes.

"Don't know, boy. Think he's a-puttin' things together, but he ain't certain."

"Does he suspect the fighting part?"

The old man chuckled.

"No, no, Sammy. Not so green as that, boy, I ain't. He thinks you're a big hummock; jest what we want him to think. Lordy! if he knew what you really is, he'd run all the way to the North Pole to git rid of ye."

"I think you're wrong," said Samuels quietly.

"Wrong!" echoed Stevens irritably. "Mebbe I don't know nothen', boy."

Samuels smiled.

"Don't be so touchy. I didn't mean anything of the sort."

"Then what do ye mean?"

"I mean that you're mistaken on one point. He'll fight till he finds he's worsted. He thinks he knows a good deal, and that his blow is a dead secret with himself. I believe he would face the champion in a bar-room, such is his confidence in his own powers."

Stevens looked doubtful.

"Mebbe so. I ain't sayin' you mayn't be right, boy; but I don't believe he'll stick."

"And I'm so sure of it, that I'm going to try and provoke him before we get home."

"How, boy; how?" said the old man eagerly.

"By exciting his jealousy."

"Jealousy? How?"

"I've noticed that he's watched me like a cat since the accident. He didn't watch Jack Maiden, when he was sweet on Lily."

"Good reason why."

"I don't see it."

"Don't ye? I do."

"What reason?"

"Jack was a darned fool, and every one knewed it in the show. Ye see the gal hain't grieved much over him."

"No, I notice that," rejoined Samuels thoughtfully.

Stevens continued in his oracular way:

"Wimmin is all alike. She warn't sot on him as she thought, or she wouldn't ha' got over it so quick. I heerd her t'other day, singin' like a lark—and she do sing pretty, boy. Got a voice jest like a bird. Ought to be in the opery, instead of walkin' a wire. But that ain't neither here nor there. What I mean to say is this. She's got over Jack entirely. Now Cola thinks she's sot on you, maybe, and he's skeered. He's a-droppin' on ye. He sees ye ain't sich a darned fool as you make out to be, and he's skeered, fur fear ye might go arter her."

Samuels shook his head.

"Impossible. It's a strange thing; but I don't feel a single thrill when I touch her hand, though I know she's prettier than Maggie. But when Mag offers her hand, and keeps her head turned as if she despised me, I feel a lump rising in my throat, and my heart beats like a trip-hammer. I love the girl, Steve, and I can't help it. That's all there is about it."

Stevens bit his lips and seemed annoyed as he answered impatiently:

"Well, what of it. It's no use. Cola won't give ye a chance to see her. If he would I'd say go for her: find out all ye kin. But 'taint no use."

The conversation dropped and the show proceeded on its course, till, one morning, Mr. Cola did not come to rehearsal, and Harry dropped in hurriedly saying to Samuels in an agitated manner:

"You'll have to attend to everything at both shows. Gittuppe will give out that I'm sick. I'm going off with the governor. Back to-morrow, I hope. See the girls home."

Then he went away, and Samuels noticed that there was an air of subdued excitement among all the employees of the show, as if they had heard something.

The only exceptions were the Corinne girls, who came in to rehearsal as usual, free from all care, Lily caroling like a bird, Maggie quiet and sedate as usual.

Samuels noticed that little Pierrelli wore an unusually triumphant sneer on his face, and saw him sidle up to the girls in the midst of a group of ladies.

The quiet helper immediately slouched closer, just in time to hear Pierrelli say:

"Good-morning, young ladies. 'Appy to see ye. 'Ope there's no 'ard feelings, now we're getting to the end of our journey?"

Maggie favored him with a look of quiet scorn as she replied:

"Our feelings are the same that they always were, Mr. Pierrelli. You're a member of this company, like ourselves, and we have always striven to behave like ladies. I hope you don't think to the contrary."

Pierrelli grinned maliciously.

"Oh, no; I don't say a word against you two. It's a pretty fake you're in. Of course, we artists don't take much stock in it, for there's nothing in it, like there is in riding. But yer pa works it up well in the papers, and he's one of the partners this year. I suppose you 'aven't 'eard about the blow-up!"

Lily pinched her sister's arm and interrupted:

"No, and we don't care to from you. If you'll leave us alone, that's all we ask, Mr. Pierrelli, unless you want another lesson."

She spoke hotly in her youthful impetuosity, and several people turned to look.

Pierrelli grinned and answered patronizingly:

"Don't be too fresh, Lil. No one cares what a kid like you says. You won't be with this show next year any'ow. Jack Maiden knew what's was about when 'e give ye the go-by—"

He paused abruptly as a vice-like grip fell on his shoulder, and he looked up into the blazing eyes of Samuels, who said slowly:

"I'm in charge of these ladies to-day. Keep a civil tongue in your head."

Pierrelli turned white, and faltered:

"I didn't mean no 'arm. You take your 'and off me, or I'll report you at the office. I ain't your sort."

Samuels gave him a slight contemptuous push away, under which the little man staggered back several feet, the helper remarking as he shoved him:

"You're right; you're not my sort."

Pierrelli turned scarlet at the titter which arose at his expense, shook his fist at the big man, and said angrily:

"I'll report you for this—see if I don't, you big bully. You wouldn't dare, if I warn't under your weight by seven stun and a 'arf."

He was turning to go away, when Samuels answered quietly:

"You're right there, too. If you were a man of my weight, I'd have done something I can't do now."

For the first time since he had been in the show, the big man had dropped his usual slow, ungrammatical form of speech, and more than one in the circle noticed it.

As for Pierrelli, he strode off toward the office, without bandying further words, and Samuels went about his business as usual, till a messenger came to call him up to the dreaded presence of Mr. Newgate.

He instantly resumed his slouching air, and proceeded to the office, where he found May and Newgate together.

The treasurer told him curtly to sit down, and went on talking to May about some routine business, till the latter said:

"All right. I'll attend to it. Now, about this man here. Is he the one Pierrelli came to complain about?"

Newgate looked over his glasses at Samuels, who was drawing a pattern on the floor, as if oblivious of the presence he was in, and the old man muttered to his partner:

"Yes. Good man, too. Quist as a lamb. Don't see what's roused him up."

Then he laughed slightly, and said:

"Samuels!"

"Sir!"

The big man straightened up and looked at Newgate with the eye of an equal, and May inspected him keenly.

"What's this I hear about your insulting Mr. Pierrelli?" asked Newgate. "Don't you know he gets ten times as much as you do? We can find plenty to fill your place, but he and his wife are at the head of the profession. You're a fool to quarrel with him. Don't you know it?"

"I don't know what the gentleman says I've been doing, sir," said Samuels, mildly. "If I knowed, I might answer."

Newgate rapped the desk sharply.

"None of that. You know as well as I do."

"Please, sir, I know what happened, but I don't know what he says happened," was the composed reply.

May smiled slightly, and muttered:

"Give him a chance. He's no fool."

Newgate seemed to be mollified, for he communicated the information.

"He says you seized him violently and nearly knocked him down for speaking to the Corinne girls in a perfectly gentlemanly manner. What have you got to say?"

"Only this, sir. It ain't so."

"What?" demanded Newgate, lifting his brows. "Do you mean to charge Mr. Pierrelli with falsehood, young man?"

May tilted back his chair and watched the big workman more keenly.

Samuels shrugged his shoulders.

"If you want to hear what happened, sir, I'll tell you the truth."

"Speak on," said Newgate, sternly. "Mind,

I shall sift this thing to the bottom. I don't allow fighters in this show. I've heard of you before as having trouble with the animal men; so look out, if you want to stay with us. Speak on!"

Samuels listened impassively, and he answered quite respectfully:

"I'll leave it to all the animal men, sir, if I'm a fighter or not. As for Mr. Pierrelli, this is what happened: Mr. Cola has gone away, and Mr. Harry left the ladies for me to take care of. Pierrelli was talking to them, and he insulted Miss Lily—"

"What did he say?" interrupted May, sharply.

Samuels stared at him, and then turned to Newgate, asking innocently:

"Am I to answer this gentleman, sir?"

Newgate bit his lip to hide a smile.

"Certainly. He's my partner, Mr. May."

Samuels turned to May.

"Beg pardon, sir. I thought you was in the advance. This is what he said."

He appeared to pause and reflect, and at last resumed:

"He told her she wouldn't be in the show next year, and that Jack Maiden knew what he was about when he gave her the go-by."

"And what did you say?" asked May.

"Told him to keep a civil tongue in his head, sir. Then he got mad because I had my hand on his shoulder—"

May jumped up briskly.

"Show me how you put your hand on his shoulder, Samuels, that I may judge whether he had a right to get mad."

Samuels hesitated.

"I don't like to, sir. You're a gentleman."

"Do as I tell you," said May, sharply.

Down came the giant's hand on his shoulder, and May winced, though he was a wiry man, saying:

"There, that'll do. We'll take the rest some other time. Now tell me what he said next, after he got mad."

Samuels smiled as he released the advance manager, who rubbed his shoulder with a wry face.

"He told me he'd report me, and that I wouldn't dare if he'd been my weight."

"And what did you say?"

"Told him if he had been my weight I'd have done more."

"What did you mean by that?" asked Newgate, sternly.

"I think, sir, I should have stood him on his head," said Samuels, coolly. "I ain't no fighter, sir, but ladies is ladies."

"That'll do," interrupted the treasurer in his sternest tones. "Now you just listen to me. The next time you get into trouble with Mr. Pierrelli you leave this show. These girls must take care of themselves. Now be off, and remember what I say."

"Yea, sir," replied Samuels, quietly, but not in the least abashed. "Good-day, sir."

He walked off, and as soon as he was out of hearing the partners burst out laughing, and May said:

"He's as strong as a horse. What does he do?"

"Attends to Cola's catapult and the girls' wires. Don't laugh, May. It won't do to have any chivalry business in the show, or all the women will be getting up prize-fights to settle who's the handsomest. What's that he said about Jack Malden? Did you hear?"

"Yes."

May told him the story, adding:

"I suppose Jack's been telling his side of the story over the show, and this big fellow is jealous for his girls. I don't blame him, Newgate. They're good, modest girls."

Newgate laughed sarcastically.

"Bah, John! Nonsense! They're only tight-wire girls. What are they to you? They must take care of themselves. How can a woman have any delicacy of feeling left when she has to show off in tights every day of her life? Don't be sentimental. These show women are all the same."

May made no answer but a dry sniff, and lit a cigar, according to his invariable habit when he disagreed with any one.

Newgate turned over his books and added, after awhile:

"Pierrelli must be pretty sure of his engagement, to boast before every one. That explains our friend's abrupt departure. Cola, I mean."

"Yes. He's begun to find out that two horses must be harnessed close to be ridden in a successful manner," replied May, dryly. "I could have saved him the journey. I've got Hooper's next year's show all down."

"What is it?" asked Newgate, eagerly.

May blew a cloud of smoke.

"Partners, Hooper, Tombs and Warren. Old man appoints treasurer. Show to be Pierrelli and wife, Towle, elephants, Bingo and the baby, Gittuppe's beasts (without Gittuppe), all the Paris Show, and a whole army of supers for two rings and hippodrome."

"And where shall we be?" asked Newgate, in a tone of uneasiness.

May laughed slightly.

"I shall travel for my health. You'll back Gittuppe and lose money. Ho

If you're a wise man you'll go to Wall street and save money to fix up a show out of the pieces. Meantime I want to tell you a little thing, Newgate."

As he spoke he went toward the door, as if about to leave the room, and Newgate said:

"What is it? Any points?"

"Yes, on human nature."

The old man lifted his brows.

"What are you talking about, May?"

"About human nature. It pays to study it. This business gives a splendid opportunity."

"Well, what's your point?" asked Newgate.

"Only this: Did you ever read the Bible?"

Newgate colored slightly.

"Of course. What are you driving at?"

"Well, you remember about Adam and Eve in the garden, don't you?"

"Yes. What have they got to do with old Hooper and the show business?"

"You'll find out presently. Well, you've seen the Cannibals old Marinelli brought over?"

"Yes. What of them?"

"Didn't have a rag on 'em except brown tights, did they? And old Tattoo, the same, only a pair of trunks."

"Will you tell me what you're driving at?" asked Newgate, testily; but May pursued in his imperturbable way:

"Nobody ever complained of their being naked, did they? No one complains about pictures or statues, and they pay big prices for them too. Nobody complains the Corinne girls are indecent, any more than Maiden and the tumblers in the ring. No one complains when prize fighters come out to spar, naked to the waist. No one complains of a lot of college boys in a boat-race, with less on than we ever allow in the circus. But just let a girl be trained up apprentice by a man like Cola from a little kid; used to going in tights till she don't know anything about it any more than Eve knew about fur cloaks, before she and Adam got the grand bounce for eating that apple; just let that girl lay the least claim to be considered a lady, and treated like a lady, by people who earn their living the same as she does; let her be as modest as she may; as virtuous as she may; let her be insulted without cause by cowardly little beasts like Pierrelli; or treated like a dog by a soulless lout like Jack Maiden; and by the Lord Harry, Newgate, she'll find some old church member, with daughters of his own, to help her on the down road with a sneer, as 'only a tight-wire girl,' and to punish any one that dares to take her part, like that fellow Samuels. Bah, there I go again. I beg your pardon, George. You didn't mean it, and I didn't either; but, by Heaven, this show business is enough to demoralize the Angel Gabriel."

And the eccentric advance manager went out, slamming the door.

CHAPTER XX. SAM'S REVELATION.

SAMUELS went back to his post in the show at rehearsal, and found the girls in a group of show ladies, who seemed to have taken their part against Pierrelli, for hot words were passing between them and Madame, who was a better four-horse rider than English scholar, and could not match the volatile ladies of "Gittuppe's Particular," who had, for a wonder, taken sides with Corinne.

The arrival of the big man quieted the hubbub, and Maggie went to the dressing-room to prepare for her wire test, while Samuels stood with his arms folded, watching for Pierrelli.

Presently he saw the little man at the other end of the ring, and strode toward him, a new look on his face.

Pierrelli saw him coming, and immediately turned to walk away, with as much dignity as he could put into his gait, without a run.

But Samuels overtook him in the stables, then deserted, and said quietly:

"Mr. Pierrelli, one word; only a minute."

"I don't want nothink to do with you," said Pierrelli, very pale, and walking on.

Samuels passed him, and as the other tried to evade him, cornered him in an empty stall, and interposed between him and the door.

"Now, look here," he said, quietly, "and look in my eye if you think you dare fool with me."

Pierrelli looked as if fascinated, and Samuels went on, almost in a whisper:

"You complained of me at the office to-day, and you knew I was right. Mr. Newgate says he'll discharge me if I have any more trouble with you. Do you know that?"

Pierrelli stared at him with dilated eyes.

"Yes. And I'll complain again if you never offers to touch me. Let me bout. D'you 'ear?"

He tried to bluster, but quailed as Samuels lifted his finger, and shook it, saying:

"Take care. Forewarned is forearmed. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What?" stammered Pierrelli.

"The next time you dare to speak to those ladies, I'll stop your reporting. I won't do what I did, but I'll put you so you'll never crack a whip again. Leave them alone and I won't hurt you. If I'm to leave this show that you may insult them, I'll see you never enter a ring again. Do you understand?"

"Why—what—you won't murder me?" said Pierrelli ghastly pale. Samuels smiled.

"No, but I'll break both arms and legs for you, and lay you up for a year. Moreover, I'll do it now, if you don't swear solemnly to leave those ladies alone. No one's looking at us. You're in my power. Do you swear?"

As he spoke, his eyes flashed and his face took on such a terrible look that Pierrelli faltered:

"For 'eaven's sake don't! I swear I'll never speak to 'em again. I won't report you. Oh, 'eavens, man, I ain't no match fur you."

"I know it," said Samuels coldly, "not in one way. But you are in another. I must use my advantage, or you'll use yours. Now remember, the first insult to them, you'd better say your prayers, for if I hit you once the office won't heal your bones."

He turned away, and came back, as if a thought had struck him, saying:

"By the by. Come back among the rest, I am going to apologize to you before the company. I mean it. Another thing. If you want to complain about me to any one, tell Mr. Cola. I give you leave to tell him. He's a man nearer my weight. Come along."

Pierrelli was glad enough to get back before the rest of the company, and Samuels followed him closely.

Every one stared at the pair curiously, and Samuels, in his usual slouchy way, said:

"Mr. Pierrelli, I hadn't ought to have laid hands on a man of your size, but I was riled. I beg pardon, sir."

"Don't mention it," returned Pierrelli in his blandest tones. "I was mad too. I didn't mean to insult the ladies. I've the highest respect for 'em. Shake 'ands and no malice."

He put out his hand and Samuels gave it such a grip that Pierrelli said:

"Ow! ow! I ain't a steam engine, man."

And the little episode passed off in a burst of laughter, while Maggie came out and tried her wire act without any notice from the Pierrelli party.

As Samuels helped her out of the net she said to him, speaking for the first time in weeks:

"I want to thank you for saving my sister's life. Pa hasn't allowed us to speak to you; but we're not so ungrateful as you think."

Samuels felt the lump in his throat of which he had told Stevens, but he managed to say in a low tone:

"And I, too, am not quite as mean as you think, Maggie South."

She started slightly; looked at him closely, and finally said in the same guarded tone:

"That's the second time you've called me by my old name. Who are you? I don't remember your face."

He affected to busy himself with the net, as he replied quietly:

"If I could see you to talk to, I could tell you."

Her woman's wit scented a secret, and she smiled as she said:

"Pa's away. To-night. I'll come alone. See me home. Can Lil come?"

"No," he said firmly. "You alone can hear what I have to say."

"I'll come," she answered; and then tripped away to join Lily, and went home.

That was a happy day for Samuels, and his old mentor noticed his air of abstraction, and quickly divined the cause.

"It's a-comin', boy," Stevens told him. "Justice is a comin', and don't you forget it. She's all-fired slow, but all-fired sure, too."

Samuels hardly heeded him. He had forgotten all about justice in love.

That afternoon his hand trembled when he touched Maggie's and the girl colored and smiled as she looked at him.

In the evening she behaved with a skill and daring he had never seen her exhibit before, and drew thunders of applause on her final dive into the net.

As she came out, she smiled and whispered:

"I'll be ready in ten minutes."

He went off to the place where the hands laid their working-clothes, and, for the first time in his career in the show, took off his rough garments, and showed a quiet, dark suit under it, such as he only wore on Sundays.

Then he went to the entrance, and waited till she came out of the dressing-room.

Presently she came forth, in a sealskin jacket and silk dress, her little feet incased in pretty boots, a bright bonnet on her head, looking piquante and pretty, as he had never seen her in the show.

She glanced round with an air of disappointment, as if expecting to see some one, for she did not recognize in the tall, trim-looking young man in the doorway, the slouching, burly figure of Samuels.

No one else was in the entranceway; but it was not till he turned his face toward her that she knew him.

Then she flushed scarlet, turned white again, and it was with an air of timidity that she came forward toward him.

He stood up, raised his hat—a new one—very politely, and said to her:

"May I dare to offer my arm, Miss Maggie?" She ran hers into his without a word, and they stepped out into the darkness.

Soon he felt her to be trembling excessively, and he was nearly as bad himself.

At last he began in a low tone:

"I beg your pardon for being so mean as to listen that day. I've felt ashamed of myself ever since. You were right to despise me. I know you have a perfect contempt for me."

"Oh, no, I haven't," she answered, very low. "I'm sure you always—always treated us—with—"

Here she stopped, and seemed about to cry, when he went on rapidly:

"You mean respect? I hope so. I don't know much of women. I don't even remember my mother. I never had a sister. But, oh, Maggie South, I have felt so mean since that day, to think you despised me. I wanted to see you to beg your pardon, to ask you to forgive me for spying on you—"

"Not on me," she interrupted, gravely, her trembling vanishing, "on Lily. It's her pardon you ought to beg. You heard her insulted—oh, how he stung her! And you never punished him."

"Do you want me to punish him?" asked the young man, eagerly. "Say the word, and I'll go back now and do it before them all, in the middle of the ring."

"No, no, no," she exclaimed, hurriedly, clutching his arm hard. "Don't think of it. He's only a poor creature. He didn't know any better."

"So I thought," replied Samuels, quietly. "Besides, I don't want to take away a man's living when he depends on his body for it."

"Who are you?" suddenly asked Maggie at this juncture. "You speak differently from what you do in the show; you look quite different; you know my name. Who are you?"

"A man," he said, in a low tone, "who stays in a menial position for love of you."

Instantly she withdrew her arm, saying:

"Sir, we are alone. I have trusted to your honor. No more in that tone, or I leave you."

He drew himself up.

"As you please, Maggie South. If it be an insult to say that I love you, I cannot recall it; but I can ask pardon, and promise to say it no more."

"See that you keep your promise," she said, in a tone of gentler meaning, taking his arm again. "Remember you're a stranger. I don't know who you are—"

"I know you," he interrupted. "I remembered your face, after twenty years, and when I saw the scar I was certain."

"What scar?" she asked, puzzled.

"Ah, you've forgotten it," he said, in a sad, musing tone. "It's like you to forget it. You always forgot yourself, Maggie. But I shall never forget it, for I made it, and I've loved you ever since that day."

The girl walked on, as if musing too.

"I don't remember," she said. "I—I—twenty years ago, you say? Why, I was a little bit of a child then. And you—how old are you?"

"Three years older than you, Maggie," he said.

"Do you remember France?"

She shuddered slightly.

"Yes, yes. Don't recall that. I had a bad fall there once, in Lyons."

"How! Lyons! I didn't know," he said.

"I was about eleven," she replied in a low tone.

"I began on the wire at seven, and they put me on the trapeze afterward, with two French boys. One of them was jealous of me, for getting applause, when he was a better performer; and one night he let me fall on purpose. I couldn't go on again for a year, till pa found me, and began to train me for this act. Did you know me then?"

"No," he answered quietly; "not then, but long before. Tell me, who was your first teacher?"

"Oh, that I remember well," she replied with animation. "It was dear old Uncle Charley Chase: I'll never forget him. He was the best and kindest teacher, I ever had. And little Sam too! What a pretty boy he was, in his Cupid act! But such a temper! Did you ever know him?"

Her companion answered, with another question.

"Do you remember, when he pushed you off the wire, and you cut your forehead on a piece of broken tea-cup?"

She opened her eyes wide, and he could see she was laughing.

"Did he? Poor little fellow! he didn't mean it, if he did. He was such a darling, with all his temper. It was over in a minute."

"And you've forgotten all about it!" he asked in a trembling tone. "Don't you remember, dear? It was in the old striped practice tent. And how he thought he'd killed you, and how he kissed away the blood, and how you promised not to tell, and said that you fell yourself. Don't you remember it, Maggie South?"

Maggie looked up as if the light broke in on her mind as he spoke.

Champion Sam.

"Why, yes, to be sure," she said, "I remember that. But how did you know it? Did—"

Suddenly she dropped his arm, and started back as if frightened:

"My God!" she said. "No one but Sam Chase knew that, and he's dead. Who are you? No, don't come near me, or I shall scream. Oh, tell me, who are you?"

"Maggie South," he answered quietly; "who told you Sam Chase was dead?"

"Pa did," she faltered. "I—is it possible?"

"Maggie," he said solemnly, "I am Sam Chase, as sure's as God's in heaven; and I've sought you, all these years, to ask you if my mother be yet alive! You were with her, when father and I came to America."

The girl stood trembling violently, and then rushed at him, clutched his arm, and began to peer up into his face in the dark.

"I can't see plain," she murmured. "I must see plainer. I don't know. You may be only another villain. I can't believe it. Come to the hotel quick to our parlor. Lily must see you. I must compare you. Come. Don't say a word. If you're Sam Chase, God has been very good to us. Come."

She took his arm, and urged him along to the hotel, he not resisting at all.

She took him in at the ladies' entrance; ran him up-stairs to a door, which she opened; rushed him into a parlor empty of people, and, saying, "Wait here," vanished.

While she was gone, he whisked off a dark wig of short hair he had worn, and showed a light, close-cropped, but curly head, which altered his whole appearance at once.

Then he took out from his pocket a little vial of alcohol and a sponge; passed the sponge over his face and neck before a mirror, and removed the brown stain in a few moments.

When he had finished, he sat down in a big arm-chair—a fair-haired, handsome young man, dressed like a gentleman—and waited patiently the coming of the girls.

He had to wait nearly ten minutes. Then the door opened, and Maggie entered with Lily, both looking as if they had been crying.

He kept his back turned to them, but saw them in the glass, pause, hesitate, whisper, then slowly advance.

He was puzzled at their conduct, till Maggie touched him on the shoulder, saying:

"Sam Chase, look up."

He turned his face to her, and the girl gave a scream and jumped back, crying:

"Who are you? How did you get in here, sir?"

"Don't be skeered, miss," he said, assuming the slouching tone and manner of Samuels to perfection, and holding out the discarded wig. "I ain't changed a bit, am I?"

Maggie uttered a deep wondering sigh, and stared at him, as if she could not help it. At last she said slowly:

"If you're Sam Chase, you've got a brown mole here."

She pointed to the junction of neck and breast bone, on the right side, and he pulled down his collar, saying:

"Here it is. Shall I show you the scar?"

Lily stood staring from one to the other, till Maggie nodded, when Sam Chase laid his finger on her forehead.

"It is there," he said. "And now, for God's sake, girl, tell me—is my mother alive? You were with her in England."

Maggie's eyes filled with tears, as she said:

"She's dead, Sam—died in my arms at sea, in the steerage, coming over to find you and uncle Charley. But she left me—"

She gathered up Lily in her arms, as the younger girl stood trembling with excitement.

"She left me—don't be frightened, Sam. She left me your sist'r Lily, a baby."

The strong young man fell back a step, and stared at the girls as if thunderstruck.

Then he stepped forward and placed his arms round both, with a protecting fondness inexplicably tender.

"Maggie South," he said, "God bless you! I know you've taken care of her. Ah, don't I know you."

They all three shed tears then, for even the young athlete was overcome, till Maggie smiled through her tears, saying:

"Ah, Sam, I couldn't do any less. Your father picked me up, a baby, in South street, and took care of the foundling as a daughter. Could I leave his baby to strangers? Oh, poor uncle Charley! I liked him even better than pa. And they were such friends, too. How glad pa will be to hear you're alive, Sam! He thought you were dead."

The young man stared at her earnestly. He did not seem to understand her.

"How did he know I was dead?" he asked. "Tell me all about this, Mag. You were old enough to know. Lily was a baby. When was she born?"

Maggie looked at Lily, as if computing.

"Twenty-fifth of January, 1866," she said. "I remembered it then, because it was eight months to a day from the time you left England by the steamer."

"And how did you come into Cola's hands?" he pursued. "Tell me that, Maggie."

Lily still looked on wonderingly, as the elder girl said:

"After you went away I stayed with Auntie Chase, and we expected to hear from you every day. But no letters came, and auntie had to do something; so she took me to France, after Lily was born, and we lived there till our money gave out, and we joined Marinelli's show. She used to go on the wire with me, till I could go alone, and then she gave it up, and I made enough for both. Then Marinelli made me learn the trapeze, with his boys, and so it went till I had the bad fall. Lily was two years old then, and our money only lasted till I got better. Then auntie didn't know what to do, and she saw Uncle Charley's name in the American papers, and said we'd go over in the steerage and find you."

"Go on," said Sam, softly, as she stopped.

"And then came a dreadful storm, and we were shut up in the hot, dark steerage, till we all felt sick, Auntie Chase worst of all; and she died, and I was left all alone to take care of Lily. Oh, Sam! it was fearful till pa came."

"Till pa came?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes," she answered. "Didn't you know? He was on the same ship, and very friendly to poor auntie. Said he knew uncle Charley, and took auntie's heart completely. He was so kind I shall never forget it. And when auntie died he took us, and he's had us ever since, he and Harry; and we owe him all."

Sam's voice was hard and strained as he said:

"And you came over in 1866?"

"Yes, Sam; in the Mexican Monarch."

"Did you know my father was dead then?"

"No. He was not. At least, pa told us not. It was only when we got ashore that he told us poor uncle Charley was dead, and he would be a father to us. Oh, Sam! you don't know how good he has been to us all! How glad he will be to find you're alive!"

"Do you think so?" said Sam, absently.

"Why, yes. He said you were dead; that some wicked witch of a carpenter, called Steve Marshall, had caused your death by an accident to a wire—"

"Did he say that?" asked Sam, rising, with a strange look in his eyes. "Are you sure?"

"I remember it as if it were yesterday," she said, recalling it.

"And how did he say my father died?" the young man pursued, with the same searching expression.

Maggie considered awhile.

"I don't rightly remember," she said, "that he ever told me how, except to show me the name in a paper. I think it said yellow fever, in New Orleans, about a week before our arrival."

"Indeed!" said Sam, musingly. "That is very strange. Would Harry Cola know?"

"I think not," she said. "Harry wasn't with us all the time. Pa said he had been at school. Pa was quite poor when he found us on the ship, and we had to work hard to live, till I got trained to do Corinne, and Harry for the catapult act. Pa used to walk the wire, and once, I think, he was obliged to fight in the ring for money."

Sam started slightly and his eyes glowed.

"Are you sure of that, Maggie?"

"I think so. I know he was away from us a long time, and came back with plenty of money and a terrible-looking face. But he told Harry he had knocked out his man and won a pot of money. And it was after that he made the catapult, and trained up Harry, till we got rich."

Sam looked thoughtfully at the ground till she had finished her story, when he replied:

"Girls, you believe I'm Sam Chase, don't you?"

"I know it now," said Maggie, decidedly. "I can see your old eyes and the look of your mouth. It's the same Sam."

"And this is my little sister Li'y?"

"Yes, Sam."

"Very well, then, girls, I've a favor to ask of you both. Don't tell Cola anything about my being alive."

"Why not?" asked Maggie, innocently. "He will be as happy as we are."

Sam shook his head in a strange way as he answered:

"Perhaps he will—perhaps not. But I have my reasons for asking you. Some day you shall know them, but not now. Will you promise not to tell any one that I am Sam Chase?"

"Oh, Sam! that's not fair. You've got something against pa. I see it in your face. I know you wrong him."

"Then you won't promise?" he asked, his lips closing into a hard, angry expression.

"Oh, Sam! don't ask me to deceive pa."

"Very well!" he said; "then good-bv, Maggie. You will never see me again unless you promise. You prefer him to me! Good-bv forever!"

He was actually leaving the room, when both girls ran at him sobbing, and Lily said, pleadingly:

"Oh, Sam, don't be so hard. I'll promise. Mag will promise. Anything. Don't let me find a brother only to lose him."

Sam looked at Maggie searchingly.

"Do you promise?" he asked.

She heaved a deep sigh.

"Yes, Sam, I promise!" she said, "but you're too hard on pa."

"Maggie South," he said, quietly, "the time will come when you'll tell me I was not hard enough. I can wait till that time. I have a secret to keep, and you two are concerned in it. For the future, in the show, I am only Samuels. Treat me as if I were a stranger. The day you show any secret between us is the last you see of me. In a year from to-day you shall know all." Kiss me good-night, both of you."

And they kept their promise.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOOPLER THE WIDOWER.

THE month of October had arrived. The Great International Show had come into the city, after the most prosperous season on record; had gathered in more shekels from the Gothamites, and had finally gone into winter-quarters.

The elephants were in their big stable; the lions and tigers had gone to Central Park; the horses were scattered out at boarding farms; the acrobats were lounging about the city, or filling winter engagements at variety balls; Madame Pierrelli and the unequalled Fowle were resting from their labors, and getting out of practice; Mr. Gittupps was recruiting from the fatigues of the season at a hotel; Cola had gone to Europe to hunt up novelties with Harry; the girls were boarding at a third class hotel, under charge of a matronly lady who had been a bareback performer in her day; Samuels and Stevens had vanished, without leaving a trace behind them; and the Flatfoot Party was gathered at "Nonpareil," in the very respectable outskirts of Madison, N. J., with Mr. Washington Meriden, in the same parlor which had once witnessed the edifying and pious interview between Mr. Hoopler and the gentlemen of the press.

"What train did you say he'd come by?" Mr. Abrams asked, for the twentieth time.

"Eleven-fifteen, from the city, Mr. Abrams," was the precise reply. "He's due now, sir; and I think I see the back coming."

They looked out, and a shabby old back drove up, from which Hoopler emerged, rotund as ever, attired in deep black, with crape to the top of his tall hat.

"Twenty-five cents is too much, John," they heard his cracked voice saying. "Too much, too much, altogether too much. Don't you get passes to the show, hey? Don't you?"

"Passes ain't no good now," returned the back-driver, solidly. "A quarter's the reg'lar fare, and you know it, Mr. Hoopler."

"Haven't got change," cackled Hoopler. "Not a single quarter. Only English money, shillings and sixpences. Here, John, here's a Canuck quarter. Best I can do. Best I can do. If you can't take it, let it slide."

"If you're too poor to pay reg'lar fare you oughter walk. Toe other boys won't trust you, and you know it, Mr. Hoopler. Gimme the Canuck, if you can't do no better."

"Here it is, here it is," returned Hoopler, as he handed the piece over and hurried into the house through the open door.

John looked at the "Canuck" or Canadian quarter, muttering:

"Worn smooth and two holes in it. Not worth more'n twenty cents. Gawl-darn you fur an old bunks. Bah!"

He spat on the steps with extreme disgust, and drove sorrowfully away, while Mr. Hoopler, with a face of funeral gloom, toddled into the parlor, looked at Meriden, then at his partners, then round the room, and burst out in a whining way:

"Oh, Wash, Wash, I shall never get over it, never get over it! I've been nigh crazy at my loss. Poor, poor Faith! Ah, boys, you don't know what it is to lose—lose—lose—a—wife like that—I shall—never—never—never get over it, never! never!"

He dashed his bat on the table, flung himself down in o a contract arm-chair, with a force that nearly broke it down, started and moved gingerly around, feeling the piece of furniture carefully, till he ascertained that it was only cracked, and then buried his face in his hands again, his elbows on the table, moaning:

"Oh, what a sorrowful coming home! Oh, I shall never get over it—never—never! Poor, poor Faith! Best of wives! Best women in the world! I shall never get over it. It'll kill me, sure!"

His partners watched him with faces that expressed different emotions.

May, quiet and inscrutable, tilted back his chair and looked curiously at the king of showmen, as if at a natural curiosity. Newgate compressed his lips and looked at the ceiling, while he played an imaginary piano with one hand, in funeral time, on the top of his hat; Mr. Wash Meriden blew his nose softly on a huge cotton print handkerchief; Mr. Abrams winked both eyes, fiddling violently, his face working hard; and finally jumped up, came to old Hoopler, patted his shoulder gently, and said, in a broken way:

"Don't take on so, Hooper—don't. She's better off. She was a good, good soul! I'll never forget poor Faith. We none of us won't. Some of the boys raised a purse for a big monument, but I knowed you wouldn't like strangers to take such a dooty. Don't take on so. Don't!"

And then he began to snivel, and strode off to the window to hide it, while the poor bereaved widower kept on:

"On, I'll never get over it, never, never. Abrams! Abrams!"

The good-heart'ed ex-four-horse-rider came back instantly, saying sadly:

"What is it, Hooper! Poor feller! I feel for ye."

"Thanks, thanks!" muttered Hooper, reaching out one hand blindly to feel for Abrams, while he hid his face with the other. "Heaven bless you, Abrams, for your—your—kind—kind—sym—sym—sympathy!" (this with a choking sob.) "I'll never—never forget it. How much did the boys raise, Abrams?"

May put his hand over his mouth, and sat still; Newgate stopped the piano-playing on his hat; Meriden held his handkerchief at his nose to listen; but honest Abrams answered, as innocently as a child:

"Twarn't much, Hooper; not as much as I'd like to have seen it. We chipped in a hundred apiece, and all the hands put in suthin', however small. There's near five thousand in the bank. What shall we do with it?"

The disconsolate showman sobbed bitterly, as he ejaculated:

"What do I care about money now? Oh, I'll never, never, never get over it! Put it—put it in a statue—of me, Abrams—mourning over her ashes. I'll give you—give—give you the design. It's all drawn out. Oh, Abrams, I'll never, never get over it!"

Abrams blew his nose violently and looked savagely at May, who colored slightly and turned away his face; Newgate looked solemnly at his hat; Meriden put away his handkerchief and coughed slightly, and the old four-horse-man said firmly:

"It shall be done, Mr. Hooper. Me and you knowed her, when we was both poor, and such a woman ought to be honored. It's a honor to any man to have been her husband."

"You're right," suddenly interposed May, in his deep, quiet tones. "She was a good woman, Abrams, and I honor her memory."

Old Hooper sobbed again, and cast a sly glance between his fingers at May; but the advance-manager had turned his back.

Mr. Newgate had resumed his piano-playing, and Mr. Meriden had drawn out a pocketbook, in which he was examining some bills. The old manager mopped his eyes with a very large cambric handkerchief, having a two inch black border, and went on, after a pause, interlarded with sighs and shakes of the head:

"Ah, boys, you don't know what it is—no, you don't, no you don't. I shall never, never get over it. Oh, dear; oh, dear!—Wash?"

The watchful Meriden looked up from his bills, and answered in deep, solemn tones:

"Yes, Mr. Hooper."

"How much—how—how much did the em—bing cost, Wash?" moaned the widower to his handkerchief.

"Seven hundred dollars, Mr. Hooper," was the solemn reply. "You said not to spare expense, and it was done in the best style, by a doctor from the city."

The widower burst into a fresh passion of grief, ejaculating:

"Poor, poor Faith! Quite right, quite right! Oh, I shall never, never get over it! And I suppose—I suppose—the—the—funeral—cost—cost as much more—as much more."

"Fifteen hundred dollars, Mr. Hooper," the factotum solemnly replied. "Here's the bill."

Hooper shook his head and waved him away.

"No—no—no—I couldn't—couldn't bear it. Is—is the—stone up, Wash?"

"Yes, Mr. Hooper," replied Meriden, with still more solemnity. "Here is the bill. Do you wish to see it?"

"No, no, no," murmured Hooper. "I couldn't bear it. How much is it, Wash?"

Mr. Meriden spread out the bill and read it aloud, as if it were a funeral service.

Hon. Eliphadet S. Hooper

To PHINEAS BRIGGS.

Dealer in Monumental M'ries, Brasses, Scutcheons and Sarcophagic Statuary.

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	Dr.
For opening grave	\$ 10 00
For lining same with marble, (Briggs' patent process)	250 00
For foundation to railing-posts, 8 at \$3 50 (brick piers)	44 00
For railing-posts (granite) 8 at \$13 75	110 00
For foundation to monument	175 25
For monument (pol. granite)	1,750 37
For cutting inscription (786 letters at 10 cts)	78 00
For gold leaf in letters	19 75
For labor in gilding (786 letters at 2½)	19 65
Total	\$2,447 62
Received payment,	PHINEAS BRIGGS (per) JOHNSON.

May listened to the reading stoically, and watched Hooper curiously. The bereaved widower kept his face buried in the black bordered kerchief, and sighed at intervals.

As the reading progressed he became quite quiet, and they saw him wince at the item about the monument, but he remained still till Meriden read out the total and the fact of the receipt of the money, when he said, in a stifled way:

"Abrams! Abrams!"

"Sir," echoed Abrams, coming to him instantly.

The old showman struggled with his feelings, and mopped his eyes with the black bordered handkerchief, as he asked in a low tone:

"How much did you say the boys had raised, Abrams—five thousand?"

Abrams took out his pocket-book and read:

"Four thousand nine hundred and eighty-seven dollars and forty-three cents, exactly, Hooper. It'll make an elegant image for the top of the monument. It's made flat, a-purpose fur it."

Hooper uttered a deep sigh.

"You're very kind, Abrams, very, very kind! I'll never forget the unselfish generosity of these poor fellows. It goes to my heart. It touches me. I'd do the same for them. But I've been thinking it would disappoint them—hurt their feelings—if the money were not devoted to the purpose for which they intended it. Eh! what d'ye say? Don't ye think so?"

"Why, bless you, no," cried Abrams earnestly. "The boys wouldn't think nothin' of it. They only meant it fur you, because they're proud of ye and like ye. Put it into the image, Hooper, put it in the image. It'll make a bully image."

Hooper sighed deeply again.

"How good you all are to me! Too good. I don't deserve it. I shall not be long with you. I know this will kill me. I shall follow poor Faith. But, Abrams—"

"Yes, Mr. Hooper. Speak out. It's jest as you say. It'll please the boys, anyway."

"Well, Abrams, I was thinking that there's enough money there to do both things. I don't need a marble statu. Make it of plaster and paint it up good. I'll see it's taken care of. And this bill—it's a perfect outrage, Abrams—it's scandalous; but, as it's paid, it can't be helped. Let it come out of the fund. Give Wash a check to recoup me, and put the rest into a good hard plaster image. It'll last as long as Madison, anyway."

May quietly opened his pocket-book, and wrote down something, with his usual inscrutable look. Newgate stopped his piano playing, and stared at the ceiling; Meriden, blew his nose delicately and without obtrusiveness, and Abrams allowed his face to lengthen, as he said slowly:

"Certain-ly—Mr. Hooper. If you—think it best. I'll write the check at once."

Hooper got up, as if overcome by his emotions, and walked to the window, while deep silence reigned in the room, save for the scratching of Abrams's pen as he wrote the check.

The old man glanced at him from under his handkerchief, till he saw the check passed to Meriden, when he came back to the table, putting away his handkerchief, and faced his partners with a look of sad business gravity, saying:

"That's settled, gentlemen. I ask pardon for indulgence in unmanly sorrow, but the blow has been a severe one. Now I will try to attend to business as well as I can in my feeble state. Mr. Meriden, have you examined the show accounts?"

"Yes, Mr. Hooper," was the solemn reply.

"Were all the vouchers correct?"

"Every one, Mr. Hooper."

"And what is the balance of profit at the end of the season?" asked Hooper, a little uneasily, looking at Newgate.

"Four hundred and twenty thousand dollars," that gentleman replied quietly. "Your share—one seventh—is sixty thousand, and was paid into bank for you last week."

It was impossible to tell whether the old man was pleased or not at the report, for his cunning old face remained its usual mass of corrugated wrinkles; but his eyes twinkled maliciously, as he said:

"And you refuse to take Bingo at the figure I paid, do you?"

Newgate nodded, and answered quietly:

"We thought he wouldn't pay at the price."

Hooper turned to Abrams:

"And you, Levi? What do you think?"

"Think? I wouldn't pay no sich price for any blamed elephant ever stepped," said Abrams, bluntly. "Let them Paris sellers have him, 'Li'e. They go in fur that sort of thing."

The old manager screwed up his face into a curious expression.

"Hem! Yes, yes, yes! Let 'em have him. Well, boys—well, what's the next thing?"

Abrams laughed rather awkwardly.

"Blamed if I know. If it was my house, I'd know what to do; but it ain't."

Hooper turned quickly on him, and grinned maliciously, as he retorted:

"True, true, true—very true! It ain't, is it? Never had such a house as this, did ye, Levi? Well, what are you all going to do next year? Want to go on with the old man? Hey! Anything left in him? Hey, May! Come, speak out. D'ye want to go on, or don't ye?"

May took up his hat from the table, and laying his hand on Newgate's shoulder, said in his grim way:

"Do you remember an offer I made you last year, Hooper?"

"Offer—offer?" cackled the old man. "No—no; you never made me an offer. You couldn't make me an offer, John. You don't carry enough weight t'make me an offer."

May smiled as he retorted:

"Possibly you've forgotten it. I made it in this room. Newgate heard me. Shall I repeat it, before Abrams?"

"No, no—it's needless," replied Hooper, with his most cunning cackle. "You couldn't make an offer I'd listen to. You haven't money enough, John."

"Well," returned May, coolly, "I'll raise it. I'll give you half a million in bonds for the article I named, and pay it now, on condition the receipt be published, conditions and all. Come now, Hooper; put up, or shut up. That's a fair business offer. Shall I tell them what I want to buy?"

For the second time in his life Hooper wilted under the intense scorn of May's look. He knew what was meant well enough, and was afraid the iron-willed May might speak out, so he hastily muttered:

"No, no, no. All a joke, all a joke. Pretty grim joke, too, May, pretty grim. Shouldn't be too hard on the old man. Then you don't want to go on, do ye?"

Abrams stared at his partners stupidly, for he was used to letting them do the business talk, but he blurted out:

"Why of course we—"

"Chut, chut!" interrupted May, with perfect courtesy. "Let us manage this business, Levi. You don't know what we know. Mr. Hooper, you've heard my offer. Newgate and I make it jointly. Five hundred thousand dollars in stock for the article we named, to be delivered at your death, the agreement to be published at once, and recorded. Here are the bonds, with the coupons attached. Twenty years to run, at six per cent. Do you take the offer or not?"

Hooper sunk back in his chair and glared at May with undisguised hatred, growling menacingly:

"You're too funny altogether, May. Do you want to insult me in my own house, or have you been drinking?"

May laughed, and waved the bundle of papers he held as he retorted, calmly:

"Neither. It's a fair business offer, and all we have to make. Do you suppose we don't know that you signed the contract with the Paris Show last July? They've lost two hundred thousand this year, and their stock is mortgaged for a hundred thousand more. You'll have to go down into the stocking next year, Hooper, and don't you forget it. I'm going to take a rest in Europe. You can raise capital for your show on what the boys call Hell's Half Acre. It's all paying property. But I want you to understand one thing, Hooper—"

Here his face lost its cold gravity, and became suffused with honest anger, as he said:

"You can fool all the rest of the world, but you've got to take another reef in your main-sail before you beat John May. I know you. Good day."

He walked out of the room, and Newgate put on his hat and said, coldly:

"Good-day, Hooper. Sorry you didn't act square with us."

He also left the room, and Levi Abrams, after a bewildered stare, burst out:

"Life Hooper, have you signed a contract with them Paris sellers, and throwed us over, arter all we've done?"

Hooper looked haggardly at him, but nodded, without speaking.

Abrams drew himself up and pulled out his pocket book, from which he drew a check.

"Look a-here," he said, slowly; "this here's the rest of that money the boys raised. I drawed it to my own order, so I could turn it over to any one you said. Here it is. I don't want no more to do with it. Who shall I indorse it to?"

"To me, of course. The boys meant it for me, didn't they?" said Hooper, dryly, his face hardening into a look of contempt at the evident emotion of his old friend.

Abrams nodded and sat down at the table, where he wrote on the back of the check a few words, and tossed it over to Hooper, who scanned it eagerly.

"There," said the old horseman, rising. "It's done, thank God. Now I'm a-going. I don't say good-day, 'Life Hooper, but I do say, God forgive you."

Then he put on his hat and stalked out of the room with his head up, like the honest old farmer he was.

Only Meriden remained to watch his em-

ployer, who gathered up the two checks, and began to chuckle softly to himself.

He never tried to deceive Meriden; he had too much contempt for him.

Presently he said in his usual cackle:

"Wash, did you see those bonds?"

"Yes, Mr. Hoopler," said Meriden.

"Did you know 'em, Wash?"

"No, Mr. Hoopler."

"You lie! confound your stupid head! you lie!" snapped Hoopler, savagely. "You do know. They're the Museum Bonds. Got 'em up myself. Your name's on 'em; secretary of the company. I'm on as president. They all went to pot ten years ago. That May's a darned hard biter, ain't he? By gum, I wish he was in with me next year. He's the only man I ever met could beat me at my own game, and I respect him. Old Newgate! Bah! I'll skin his crowd next season. He's going to run Gittuppe against me. What d'ye think of that? Hey? And Abrams! The darned old four-mule pad rider! Nearly crying, by gum! I'll make him cry before next summer's over. Darn his sentiment! A showman sniveling over a dead old woman. Confound you, Wash, I've a mind to bounce you about those bills. They're outrageous. You're in with the undertaker and Briggs. How much did you get? Bah! you wouldn't tell. Don't blame you. Well, I don't care. I'm a little ahead, after all, on the two checks. What's that?"

A hack rumbled up to the door, and a lady was seen to get out, young and pretty.

Hoopler chuckled and rubbed his hands.

"Look at that, Wash," he said. "What d'ye think of that? That's my second wife. Picked her up in England. How d'ye like her?"

CHAPTER XXII.

SLUGGER SAM'S TRAINING-GROUND.

Down by the borders of the Gulf of Mexico, the sun shines bright and warm; the palms and sugar-canies stand green and waving; the mocking bird sings in the magnolia; the oranges hang like globes of gold on the dark green branches; while the herons and cranes flash through the openings in the everglades, and the banana grows in every clearing, all winter long.

In the winter of 18—, when the streets of New York were ankle deep in mud; when the fog hung over the ferries, and boats crashed through acres of floating ice and slush; when the days alternated between the searching cold of the "northwester," and the raw misery of the sleety "northeaster," two men in Florida were standing in their shirt-sleeves, fanning themselves in the shade, watching a third, who was running, full speed, on a circular track over a hard, sandy beach, costumed in a single pair of cotton drawers, with running-slippers laced on his stockingless feet, and a handkerchief round his head.

As he passed them for the fifth time, one of them called out to him:

"Come in, next lap, Sammy. Time you had your rub-down and sleep."

The runner nodded and dashed on.

He was a model of manly grace, with a smooth, Apollo-like figure, sined down into bone and sinew, fleet as a grayhound, every muscle casting a deep shadow as it moved to and fro.

He made his last lap at racing speed, and came in, breathing deeply, but smiling.

"I can take another mile," he said, "if you want it, Steve."

"No, no, Sammy," said his old trainer, decidedly. "That's enough. There's sich a thing as overdo'in' trainin'. You're to fight to-morrow. Come."

They took him into a little white cottage, half hidden in the dark foliage of an orange grove, and rubbed him down with crash towels, scraping him like a horse, the young athlete lying down on a mat to be groomed.

Then Steve said to him:

"Now for yer shower, and then take a nap."

They took him to an adjoining room, and dashed pails of water over him, rubbing him again with flesh-brushes till he glowed all over, when he was put into bed and fell asleep like a baby, as the trainers retired to talk about him.

Steve's companion was a powerful man, with a jolly English face and a decided cockney accent.

"Well," said Steve, "what do you think of him now, Joe? Will he win?"

"If 'e don't, I ain't no judge," answered Joe laconically. "Barrin'—barrin' accidents."

"Of course," returned Steve. "But he ain't goin' to have no accidents, so long as me and you're round, Joe."

Joe winked and observed sententiously:

"E's a good 'un. I don't want none of 'im. E's better'n I do myself, and that's 'arf the battle. Lord, if the champion knew 'ow to 'it, 'e'd be a terror; but 'e don't, ye see."

"And no temper," said Steve, enthusiastical-ly. "Don't care how hot he gets it, he never loses his head. Oh Joe, he's a darlin'."

Joe sniffed slightly.

"E's a good 'un. That tells the 'ole story. I say, Steve, Got any rhino on 'im?"

"Every cent we made last spring," said Steve decidedly. "It's win or lose now. Colonel

Tom's put it out at good odds—six to one, most of it, and some ten to one."

Joe grinned as he observed:

"What a lot of flats some of them sharps is, sometimes, to be sure. That's 'cause 'e got the best of me. Lord, Steve, if I'd 'ad 'is young bones, I'd 'a' walked away with 'im in nine rounds. But natur's givin' way, my boy. It's natur'. I ain't what I used to be, Steve, nor you, nuther."

And the old boxer sighed slightly, while Steve observed comfortingly:

"You was the best man of your weight I ever seen, Joe, in your prime. Never mind. It's all the same a hundred years hence, as the saying is."

"Much good that does *hus*," growled Joe. "It's a pot of money I'm arter, Steve. I've 'ad glory enough. When I can start a nice public ouse, and 'ave hall the nobs a-comin' to their chops and steaks, and the best o' brown stout, with a nice sanded floor, and old Joe be'ind the bar, a-takin' in the rhino, at a dollar a 'ead for beatin', and champagne parties hevery bevening, I'll let them 'ave the glory as wants it."

Steve nodded sagaciously.

"I reckon you could do a good biz, Joe. I ain't ambitious that way. I wants to have a nice little side-show of my own in the Bowery, with a few freaks* up-stairs, and a room for wax-works, and a brass band and a sword-swaller, and a good feller to lecture, like the Markis, or old Hutch, or Hall. Ah! Hall was the boy! He'd draw the tears out of a mermaid, he would, when he was a-lecturing on George Washington an' his Ma, in wax."

Joe stared at him in some surprise.

"You're getting expensive, hain't you? I hain't much hon show business, but that ought to cost a 'eap."

Steve grinned as he answered:

"I could do it, nice, for a thousand in stock, and keep the runnin' expenses down to 'bout seventy five a week. At ten cents a head, with good paper and ads, and a live man, I'd rake in my hundred a day right along, and keep on addin' novelties. Reckon I'll do it when this snap's over."

Joe shook his head and began to rummage in his pocket for a short black pipe, which he filled and lighted before he spoke again.

Then he looked out over the dancing waters of the blue gulf, and observed musingly:

"This 'ere's a rum country. Prize fights in the dead of winter; with horanges a growin' on the trainin'-ground. 'Ow much money d'ye think I've got out, Steve?"

"I don't know. A thousand?"

"Thousand be blowed. Where'd I get it? No, not so much as that; but, if your man licks the champion, I'll make fifteen 'undred."

Steve did not offer any confidence as to his own outlay, but remarked:

"Well, I'm glad you're on him. It makes a man work harder to save his money. He's waking up. Time he had his practice."

They heard Sam yawning, and went in, to be greeted with the question:

"Well, Joe, can you hit out to day? It's my last practice, and I feel as strong as a horse."

Joe grinned rather ruefully.

"I s'pose so," he said, "but you just play light on the old man to day. I ain't as young as I used to be. Tain't necessary to knock a man out, when 'e's engaged to spar for practice, is it?"

Sam laughed, and got out of his bed, to put on his drawers, while Joe stripped to the same airy costume, and brought out an old blackened set of boxing-gloves.

Then both went out to a place on the sandy beach, where a twenty-four foot square had been marked out, and Sam observed as he put on the gloves:

"Now, you old rat, try all you know on me, and don't you spare me, for there's money on my winning to-morrow."

As he spoke he advanced on the veteran, and Steve watched the sparring with an admiration that found vent in frequent cries of: "Good, Joe!" "That's my Sammy!" "Well stopped!" "How's that for a cross-counter?" "Look out, Sammy; he's a-foxin'!" "Now he's got ye, Joe." "No by gum, he bain't." "Sock it to him, Joe." "Old style forever!" "He's got yer now, Sammy!" "No." "Well, by gum if the boy bain't sent Joe flyin'." The round was intensely spirited, and marked by wonderfully quick, hard hitting, in which the veteran held his own for nearly three minutes, with rattling exchanges, and then he seemed to get tired, and Sam pressed him close a smile on his handsome face, till, with a tremendous blow full on Joe's broad chest, he sent the old boxer flying over the line and on his back, when the young man cried:

"Hurrah, Joe! you're the best man I ever faced with the gloves, till you get tired. I wish I had another as good as you, to see if I could floor him without a rest."

Joe got up slowly, saying:

"I b'lieve ye could, boy. No, that's enough

*Freaks." Short for "freaks of nature;" the common show-word for "living curiosities," such as albinos, dwarfs, two-headed girls, giants, six-legged cats, etc., etc.

for to-day. I dont want ye tired. I want ye as fresh as a daisy when the boat comes. She's due in an hour. We've got to pack up."

Sam smiled and obeyed with perfect docility, while his trainer proceeded to dress him as if he had been a baby, and pack up the simple moveables in the hut by the beach.

An hour later, dressed in a dandified suit of white flannel, and wrapped in a large striped Mexican serape, he was lying under a palm tree, watching the coming of a puffing little steam-tug, while Joe and Steve were sitting on heaps of bags and bundles, smoking black pipes and chatting over the prospects of the coming battle.

Then the tug came to, offshore, sent in a big boat through the surf, and took off the three friends, who soon stood on her deck, shaking hands warmly with Colonel Tom Darling, who said to Sam:

"You look fit to fight for a man's life, Sam. The champion's got a big crowd with him, but we'll have fair play. We're going up the Muggahoochie River all night, to a sandy island in the Fifty-League Everglade. It's between the Indian Reservation and the military territory—a lovely place. Now you go and have some dinner. I've got up one on purpose for you. Doctor Elliot has ordered every item. I want you to live like a king till you fight. Can't be too strong. The champion outweighs you ten or twelve pounds, Sam. You look too fine."

"No he ain't too fine, colonel," said Steve. "He's just right: you feel him. He's as hard as so much hickory and whalebone."

The colonel felt the young man's muscles, looked at his fresh, glowing face—the picture of health—and observed:

"You look all right. How's your wind?"

"Ran a mile in four twenty-eight, this morning," said Sam, smiling. "I can stand twenty minutes in-fighting, colonel, if the champion can."

The colonel shook his head.

"Don't you depend too much on in-fighting, Sam. It's the place for accidents. You might get a wrench and a cross-buttock that would throw the battle. You do what Joe tells you. He's been in fourteen battles, and the champion was too much for him. Don't despise your enemy."

Sam colored slightly, and Joe came in to shield him from blame by saying:

"He's jest as kind as a kitten, colonel, and I've put half my money on 'im. 'E won't disobey horders. You'll see."

"Very well," said the colonel; "then take him down, Joe, and give him his dinner."

And down Sam went to a dinner of fresh, juicy steaks and chops, enough to make an epicure's mouth water, which the young athlete attacked with a vigorous appetite, and then came on deck to find the tug entering a broad estuary, which ended in a river that ran through somber live-oak and cypress forests, draped with the ghostly fringes of gray Spanish moss, giving the forest such an unearthly look that old Joe observed:

"Rum country, colonel. Blowed if it hain't. Jest the place for ghostesses and bloody murders and sich. It don't look like a honest country, where a feller can 'andle bis mauleys like a man. Seems as if the chaps as live 're must be fond of pisenin' each other."

The colonel laughed at the conceit.

"They're good honest folks, Joe. Call them crackers. Rather stupid, but mean well."

"Crackers!" echoed Joe. "I'll crack 'em, if they come any of their games hover me. From what I've seen of 'em, I think I could 'andle about five on 'em, heavy."

Then the boat passed on its way through the forest till they came to a broader stretch, full of low mud-banks; and the alligators began to flop off into the water, at which Joe remarked:

"W'ot in 'eaven's them, colonel?"

"Alligators, Joe."

"Halligators? That's what they makes boots out of, ain't they?"

"Yes, Joe. They shoot them for the hides."

Joe looked at the reptiles thoughtfully, and observed:

"What a pity 'tis we hain't got 'ides like alligators, colonel."

"Why, Joe?"

"I've 'eerd they'll stop a bullet, sir."

"They'll glance one, Joe—a round one, not sent straight. They won't stop a conical bullet well aimed."

"Well, I'd chance it, colonel, if I 'ad sich a 'ide. I'd let the champion punch, and I'd punch with 'im, and see which could punch 'ardest. I wish I 'ad a 'ide like a balligator, colonel."

The colonel burst out laughing at the quaint ideas of the veteran boxer, and Sam roared, while good-humor and jollity reigned on the boat for the rest of the day, as they pressed on.

Late in the evening they sighted another boat ahead, and a great tooting of steam-whistles ensued as they ran on, all night long.

Sam slept peacefully below, guarded by his faithful trainers, and when morning came he

was roused up by Stevens, looking fondly at him, to say, with a shaking voice:

"Sammy, my darlin' boy, the ground's in sight, and Joe's gettin' things ready. How do you feel—all right?"

Sam yawned, and stretched out his grand white arm to grasp his old friend's hand.

"Don't you get off your base, Steve," he said good-humoredly. "I want you to keep your head clear to watch me and tell me how things are going. If you're scared for me, I shall be scared for myself."

The old man suddenly stooped down and kissed the young athlete's forehead, muttering:

"Forgive me, boy, I couldn't help it. Ye lay asleep, and looked so like ye did the day I first took ye, arter poor Charley died. It's all right. I ain't skeered fur ye a bit. But ye've got to take it to-day. This ain't no Patsy Pastor. It's the champion. Don't be rash. Do what Joe tells ye. He knows all the champion's points. He's sparred with him many a time. Be obedient."

Sam smiled in old Steve's face.

"Dear old fellow," he said; "more than father to me! I'll win this battle to-day, and I promise you it shall be my last. But I'll win it Steve, or die on the ground. Hush! Here's Joe."

Down came Joe, grinning amiably and crying out briskly:

"Come, my babby, come and take a little snifter to get ye in trim. Nothin' eavy, but jest enough to put the art into ye. They're a choosin' the ground, and we've got choice of corners. It'll take 'em a good hour to wrangle, and you'll ave time to settle your stummick. I seen the champion. 'E's lookin' arty. It'll be a noble fight, my boy; but you'll knock 'im into a cocked 'at, if you does what I tells ye. Let 'im come fur ye, and take him in the line-fighting. That's what shows a man, Sammy. Keep yer heyses skinned and your 'ead a-waggin', and let 'im 'ave it, 'ot an' eavy. Fust round will settle the battle. If 'e flinches then, you've got 'im, lad. 'Ere's your beef tea."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHAMPIONSHIP BATTLE.

Out in the midst of the Fifty-Mile Everglade, the Muggahoochie river widens into a lagoon in a basin of white coral sand, bordered with mud deposited by the stream itself.

In the midst of the lagoon stands a little island, several feet higher than the stream, with overhanging banks.

Many thousand years ago it was part of a sandy plain, when the Muggahoochie was a baby stream, and a hard rock at the upper end resisted the water better than the softer sand round it.

So the baby Muggahoochie made a gutter round the rock, and the gutter deepened as the Muggahoochie grew up, till the island became a fixture, growing daily from accumulated drift-wood.

It measured about six hundred feet square inside the undulations, had a grove of trees round the edge, and an open space of hard white sand in the middle, that looked like a very shallow saucer, with green banks round it.

In this saucer was pitched the ring, and a crowd of some five or six hundred men, most of them well-dressed, was scattered round the enclosure, talking, smoking and betting.

It was not a crowd of common roughs by any means, for the expedition was safe to cost each member about a hundred dollars before he got back, and roughs cannot afford that.

There were about a dozen members of Congress; three judges of criminal courts; six score political leaders, from wards up to States; two Western senators; thirty or forty muscular lawyers and doctors; four titled gentlemen from abroad; reporters from ten great dailies; the editors of three great weeklies; three hundred men of all ages who lived on the means accumulated in trade by their fathers or grandfathers, and a residuum of quiet, well-dressed persons, who looked like retired army officers, or parsons of the sporting kind, once common in Methodist circuits. These men, the quietest of all, were the prize-fighters by profession.

Two tents had been set up in the shade, and the steamers lay in the lagoon, tied up to portions of the drift-wood dam, at one end of the island.

The sun was about an hour high, a pleasant, cool breeze rustled the foliage of the trees, and the buzz of voices had subsided as the last bets were recorded, when Colonel Tom Darling got up on a camp-table and called out:

"Gentlemen, if you'll give me your attention a minute I'll read out the conditions of this match."

A silent, eager throng instantly gathered round him, and he read out:

"This battle is to be conducted on the London rules, and Mr. Shortliffe is accepted by both men as referee."

"The champion fights at one ninety-eight pounds; Catapult Sam, one eighty-six."

"Catapult Sam chooses the southeast corner, and is seconded by Steve Marshall and Bristol Joe."

"The champion takes northwest corner, and is seconded by Bill Black and the Irish Ruby."

"Either man striking below the belt, kicking, biting, gouging, striking the other when down, or falling without a blow, will lose the fight."

"This is to be a fair fight, and no malice or favor shown."

"The champion's colors are green, and Catapult Sam sports the Stars and Stripes."

A great cheering went up as the colonel added, good-naturedly:

"There's plenty of room for all to see, and no excuse for squabbling. I hope every gentleman who loses money to-day will take it in good part, and that we shall redeem the manly and chivalrous art of self-defense, with the weapons of nature, from the aspersions cast upon it by hypocritical fanatics, who dare not face a man like a man. That's all, gentlemen. Get to your places. The men are ready."

Then every one rushed to his place round the ring, and a dozen steamboat hands did a lucrative business in camp-chairs at a dollar a head, till the crowd hushed into expectancy, watching the tents.

Over the champion's habitation floated the green flag, dear to the members of an oppressed and generous race. Over Sam's was the silk banner of the Union.

Presently out of his tent came the champion, with his seconds carrying the sponge, bottle and towels.

He was a tall, handsome young fellow, with a fresh, smiling face, stripped to the waist, in white silk drawers and low running slippers, his green silk colors at his waist.

He walked to the ring, nodding and smiling to his friends, who seemed to be legion, and stepped over the ropes to take his seat in the corner, when his seconds instantly covered him with a big blanket, as if he had been a baby afraid of cold.

Mr. Shortliffe, burly and good-natured, stepped in a moment later, and every eye was turned toward Sam's tent, for he had not yet come forth. They began to call out jeeringly:

"What's the matter there?"

"Backing out, Joe?"

"Bring on your man, Bristol!"

Colonel Tom rose up and said quietly:

"No jeering, please, gentlemen. It's not fair to a novice. Here he comes."

In fact at that moment the familiar figure of Bristol Joe made its appearance at the door of the tent, and he came out with old Steve Marshall.

Joe was resplendent in a blue flannel yachting suit and a silk jersey, in which his burly figure looked gigantic, while his round face shone with good-nature, as he called out:

"Old yer 'orses, gents. We're a-comin' like a thousand of brick."

Old Steve carried the bottle and towels, with a huge sponge, and wore the same uniform as Joe, but looked grave and sedate, if not a little anxious.

Then came a low buzz of curiosity and enforced admiration, as Catapult Sam stepped out, like a living statue, and walked with a springing step toward the ring.

His handsome, clean-shaven face was calm and rather severe in outline, with a firm mouth and slight curve of the lip that told of confidence in his own powers, while his figure was absolutely faultless from crown to toe, in its white symmetry.

He wore white silk tights and white ankle boots closely laced, the only dash of color on his figure being the little Union flag in his belt.

He tripped forward like a dancer, amid intense silence, threw his little white cap into the ring, and cleared the ropes with a flying leap; to be then greeted with a round of applause in which the champion himself joined, remarking to Bill Black:

"Be the powers, Bill, he's too party to spoil; but I'll have to do it."

Then Sam went and sat down in his corner, when both men eyed each other with great curiosity; for it was the first time they had met.

Mr. Shortliffe read out the rules, and called out:

"Step up, men, and shake hands."

Both men started up, and came to the center of the ring, where they locked hands, and looked at each other smilingly but searchingly.

Each thought he had never seen a finer specimen of humanity, and the "sports" were puzzled to decide between them.

The champion was a little the taller and heavier; but he looked a trifle too fat, and his flesh was whiter than Sam's, now they were close enough to be compared. A delicate pink glow was plainly to be seen on the skin of the novice, and his cheek had a fine color.

"Time," said Mr. Shortliffe.

The seconds got ready in their corners, the referee stepped out of the way, and the champion and Catapult Sam skipped back into position, and began sparring cautiously for an opening.

The champion looked grave but confident. He eyed his man like a hawk, stepped gingerly round to the right, felt his way in, amid intense silence, and suddenly dashed in, delivering a

rapid left-hander, and skipping back before the return.

But the blow fell short, and Sam smiled slightly, and backed half a step, as if to lure a repetition of the attack.

The champion frowned slightly and came on again. He caught sight of old Joe, with a grin on his face, and it irritated him.

Suddenly he set his teeth, and dashed in, right and left, thinking to drive his man round the ring by showering in blows; and Catapult Sam, after a single skip back from the first onslaught, met him fairly with a "stopper," and closed to the terrible half-arm "in-fighting," as Joe had ordered him.

With his head well up, and vibrating from side to side, in the opposite direction from his hands, a fierce, eager look on his face, like that on the Apollo shooting the Python; he kept both fists battering from below, up on the champion's mouth, the other's blows coming from above on the sides of his head, many of them glancing.

Everybody else held his breath, even to Shortliffe, and old Joe's mouth opened in wonder, for such hot work in a first round was unusual.

Then a confusion of cries, at first low, but rising in volume, came from all round the ring.

"Bravo, champion!"

"Go it, Sam!"

"Look at that now!"

"Heavens! what slugging!"

"Who'll stand it longest?"

"The champion will."

"Sam will."

"He won't."

"A thousand even he does!"

"Done! Done!"

And then the cries faded again into whispers, as the two gladiators fought like tigers, all over the ring; first one pressing, then the other; both faces white and set, with glaring eyes and clinched teeth; bodies vibrating to and fro; breath getting shorter; arms twinkling like the spokes of a wheel; the sharp "crack! crack!" of the blows echoing for fifty yards away; the champion fighting for his life and honor, Sam for all he held dear; till old Joe started up in his corner and gripped Steve hard, muttering: "By gum! the boy's gettin' the best of the exchanges. The champion's a-goin' to quit. Yah! Gr-roo! look a-there!"

The champion's breath was growing shorter, and he was backing away at last, fighting on the defensive, the blood flowing from mouth and nose over his broad chest, while Sam's forehead was marked by a big lump; but his teeth were set firmer than ever, as he kept on plying his fists, in those short, deadly stabs, following the champion close, and preventing him from gaining a resting-spell for a single instant.

Then the champion felt the ropes touch him, and the touch gave him the power of desperation, as he began to deliver full-armed blows, reckless of his own punishment, and backed Sam away again, to the middle of the ring.

Finally he closed to a grapple, and the two men closed in a writhing, silent struggle of a full minute, at the end of which time both fell together, Catapult Sam uppermost, and lay there panting and exhausted.

Mr. Shortliffe walked to the side of the ring, watch in hand, and said to the reporters, in a low tone:

"First round, seven minutes, thirty-eight seconds. Sam gets the best of the fall and first blood. It can't last this way. They're fighting too fast."

Old Joe and Steve came out, and carried Sam to his corner; while Bill Black and the Ruby performed a like office for the champion.

"Don't try to git up, Sammy," muttered Joe. "You've got 'im, boy. 'E's done all 'e knows. Steve, the boy's goin' to win in twenty minutes, if 'e 'beys horders."

"He'll obey," muttered Steve, sprinkling his charge with alcohol from the bottle, and sponging his flushed, bruised forehead.

"He's only got one mark, by gum, but his wind's pretty short."

"The champion's gone for good," said Joe grimly, glancing over into the other corner. "That's right, Sammy, boy. Lay still and let us do the talking."

They worked at him like beavers, till Mr. Shortliffe called sharply:

"Time, men! Second round!"

Sam allowed his seconds to lift him up, but he walked steadily to the middle of the ring.

The champion did the like, and the spectators had an opportunity of comparing them again. The champion's lips were swollen and cut on the teeth, and one side of his jaw looked puffy; but his eyes were still all right.

Sam had a big lump on his forehead, close to the hair, and the side of his head showed the effects of the glancing blows, but otherwise he was the same as ever.

Both men breathed short and sparred warily for wind, but Sam looked decidedly the fresher of the two, while the champion seemed to be suffering pain, from the paleness of his face.

The two sparred for nearly a minute without a blow passing, till the flush on Sam's face an-

Champion Sam.

nounced that his strength was returning, and Joe muttered to Steve:

"E's got his second wind a'ready, Steve. Now look out! E'll go for 'im now."

Sure enough, the young man began to spar more assuredly, and all of a sudden dashed in, hammer and tongs, delivering a facer on the champion between the eyes, and getting away unharmed.

Then the champion got his second wind to a certain extent, and leveled a vicious right and left at Sam, who ducked his head and got in three terrible body blows, under which the champion grunted and fell.

Sam walked to his corner, and Joe whispered:

"You've got 'im, Sammy. You've got 'im. Take a suck of the lemon, boy. Don't rush 'im. E's a-weakenin'. Let 'im rush you, and stop 'is temper. Give it 'im 'ot on the nob."

Sam smiled slightly, in a confident way.

"I've not tried all I know, Joe," he said.

Joe grinned delightedly.

"Try it now, then! E's a-sufferin' like—"

Joe couldn't think of a simile before Mr. Shortliffe called:

"Time. Third round!"

The champion came up much better in wind, but evidently afraid of his man; and, after sparring cautiously, went down in parrying a blow, and lay still.

"Foul, Mr. Referee! We claims a foul!" cried J.

Shortliffe shook his head.

"Pretty near, Joe; but not quite. Let the men fight on, till the best man wins."

The champion grinned in his corner at his success in gaining another minute's rest, and came up to the fourth round as if he felt better than before.

"Press him close, Sammy," said old Joe, and Sam obeyed orders so well that the champion went down at the second blow, amid the jeers of the crowd, who began to cry:

"Here's a great champion!"

"Put him on ice, Bill."

"Give him a nursing-bottle!"

"Why don't he stand up or give up?"

Bill Black eyed them with some contempt, as he retorted scornfully:

"Mebbe some of you fellers had better take my place, or his'n. I know my biz. Here, Patsy, take a sup."

Then he whispered to his principal.

"He's getting riled. Get him to come in hard, and slug him on the retreat."

The champion nodded, and the fifth round began, in which he obeyed instructions so well that he got in two hard blows on Sam's head in return for one on the ribs, and went down laughing.

"This won't do, Sammy," said old Joe, sternly, as the young man came back to his corner.

"You're a losin' your 'ead, and you'll lose the fight, if you ain't keerful. E knows you're the best man and e ain't goin' to fight up to ye any more. Let 'im come fur ye, and coax 'im on again."

"But we won't come," said Sam, rubbing his head where he had been hit.

"You do as I tell you," retorted Joe, sharply.

"Coax him and slug him."

"Time! Sixth round!" cried Shortliffe.

Sam went in quietly and stood off at long range, so that the round was uneventful for nearly a minute.

Then the champion saw his opening and dashed in, with his usual rapid skill, to deliver a hot one and get away.

Sam ducked his head like a flash and closed in with a couple of heavy body blows, and in another minute the two men were closed in a struggle as desperate as that which had marked the first round, but with far different result.

Before the champion could collect his wits sufficiently to drop, he felt the ropes at his back and his strength going, while the pile-driving blows of Catapult Sam were on his jaw, breast and neck, battering the life out of him. He lost his head, turned his back to run; was driven to and fro; till, in his desperation, he clutched wildly at Sam to grapple, and threw his guard open.

In that moment Sam uttered a short laugh of exultation, pushed his foe's head back with the left hand with all his force, and let drive a single right-hander, full on the fatal spot, over the jugular vein.

The blow sounded like a whip-crack, and the champion dropped like a log. Catapult Sam looked down at him with an eager, inquiring gaze; then remarked to Shortliffe quietly:

"That finishes this battle, sir."

He walked to his corner, and said to Joe:

"I got it in at last. But he was a good man."

Joe looked over into the corner where Bill Black and the Ruby were trying in vain to revive the senseless champion, who lay as limp as a rag over his chair.

"Ope 'e ain't dead, Sammy," he said uneasily. "That would be a bad go for us."

Sam shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. I know how hard to hit. I told you I'd not tried all I know."

"Time!" cried Mr. Shortliffe.

Bill Black threw up the sponge, and the referee said aloud:

"Sam, you've won the battle, and you're entitled to be called Champion of America. Gentlemen, three cheers for Catapult Sam, Champion of the World!"

And the lonely island in the Muggahoochie Lagoon rung with cheers:

CHAPTER XXIV.

CATAPULT SAM'S JUSTICE.

THE season of 18—had closed, and with it a great battle in the show business.

Three monster concerns had been running the same routes in the circuit, fighting each other in the large cities; spending money like water and abusing each other in advertisements. Their advance-parties had been stealing marchands from town to town; buying up the showboards; hiring all the empty lots; tearing down each other's paper, and occasionally coming to blows, while "the guys" enjoyed a feast of daring acts, bewildering to the choice.

Comic lithographs were in every shop window representing the great Mr. Moses Hindfoote as a giant among showmen, advancing, with his hands in his breeches' pockets, while Hooper, Gittuppe, Cola, and a crowd of lesser showmen were fleeing like Liliputians from the tramp of his elephantine boot.

Terrible stories about Hooper's city property, which was familiarly designated "Hell's Half-acre," from the character of the buildings erected thereon, circulated in country papers; and the editors grinned and took in cash and passes from all three shows with charming impartiality.

It was a regular "cut-throat season" and witnessed the arrest of the enterprising Mr. Howard of the Hooper Show, for assault and battery on an envious rival, Mr. Howard being a man of muscle.

Little money was made, on account of the rivalry, and it soon became a question of "who had the longest stocking" to dive into for shekels of gold and silver.

It was an exciting season, and closed with all three shows badly hurt. Hooper, Tombs, and Warren, went into winter quarters, battered and worn, to repair damages.

Mr. Hindfoote re-entered Philadelphia with a blaze of glory, and divided a profit of nine dollars and thirty-seven cents between his right and left breeches pockets.

Gittuppe and Cola concluded to try a winter season in the land of the orange and fig, and took the much-dreaded Southern circuit.

The result was a speedy dissolution of the partnership, Cola getting out unhurt, and taking Pippa and Corinne away to join the Hooper show.

The ambitious Gittuppe survived the winter by help of the cotton crop in the Sunny South, and got as far as St. Louis, where the sheriff took charge of his show in the spring, at suit of Mr. George Washington Newgate.

The stock, at auction, left Mr. Newgate a net loser of some twenty thousand dollars, with the satisfaction that he had obliged Hooper to mortgage "Hell's Half Acre" and the Madison farm of "Nonpareil" to cover his expenses.

Then Hooper and Hindfoote agreed to disagree, and run on diverging tracks.

Rivalry that entails an annual loss of a hundred thousand dollars possible profit, is too expensive to be kept up over a year in the United States of the nineteenth century.

Therefore, in the spring, when Gittuppe came to grief, Hooper sallied forth in rejoicing mood, and Cola chuckled, as he said to Harry:

"We've got 'em this time. It's been a tough pull, but I've weathered the storm, I think."

The catapult act remained a feature of the Great Hooper Combination, but Corinne was not there.

Maggie was out of her apprenticeship; Lily had got married to a quiet person who ran the confectionery privileges of Mr. Hindfoote's show, and had refused to go on the wire any more.

The "original Corinne," for some unexplained cause, had parted from Cola, and accepted an engagement with the establishment of Maiden and Silver, who kept out of the way of the Leviathans of the show business, and made a good deal of money every season, by attending to their own affairs.

The season was nearly over when Mr. Cola, being then in a Western town, received notice that a gentleman wished to speak to him on show business, as the agent of a novelty.

Cola pricked up his ears instantly; for he was always on the lookout, for novelties, to be hired cheap and rehired dear.

"Send him up," he said to the waiter; for he was in a private parlor of a big hotel, where he had been holding audience as advance manager, with great state, at the expense of the show.

A tall, exceedingly handsome gentleman, fashionably dressed and quite young, came in and bowed formally, saying:

"This is Mr. Nichols, I presume."

Cola drew himself up, answering.

"My business name is Cola, sir. I dropped that of Nichols, when I went into the business."

The stranger nodded indifferently.

"I remember. You in an, after the death of

poor Chase. People said you had something to do with that."

Cola turned deadly pale, and his eyes glared as he answered slowly:

"The coroner's jury said no such thing, sir. A low-lived scoundrel called Marshall tried to spread the report, and I knocked him stiff for it. Who are you? Do you want a taste of the same dose? I've not forgotten how to hit, yet."

The stranger put down his hat in the coolest manner, and took out a card-case before he replied, dryly:

"Exactly. Here's my card and two more that may interest you. Look at them, please, before we talk any more on business."

He kept a table between him and Cola, and threw a card across the cloth to the advance manager, with a square white envelope, of the kind used to contain wedding cards. A bow of white ribbon, peeping out, showed that such were the contents of the envelope. Cola's color flickered uneasily. For the first time in twenty years he was puzzled and alarmed at this quiet, imperturbable stranger, whose face seemed strangely familiar to him.

He took up the first card, and even his practiced nerves did not prevent a start as he read:

"MR. SAMUEL CHASE."

His fierce black eyes sunk into a furtive glance and his fingers trembled as he opened the envelope and looked at the wedding cards.

He read on one:

"MAGGIE L. SOUTH."

The other contained the legend:

"MR. AND MRS. SAMUEL CHASE,

"Married at All Souls' Church,

"Philadelphia, June 17th, 18—."

Then he absently pushed back the cards into the envelope and eyed Chase in the same lowering, furtive way for near a minute before he said:

"Well?"

Chase looked him in the eye and Cola's glance fell as the young man said, in a cold, business way:

"My wife has appointed me her agent. You owe her some money, it seems."

Cola sneered, and squared his shoulders with an air of relief.

"Is that all? Poor girl! She doesn't understand business. I don't owe her any money. If you've been fool enough to marry her for that you'll find it a grave mistake, young man. I don't owe her any money."

Chase smiled.

"Our lawyer informs us differently. We have the articles, and it appears that, under them, Maggie South's apprenticeship really expired two years ago. You drew for her services and those of Lilian Chase, my sister, now Mrs. Alfred Marlowe, two hundred and fifty dollars a week for the last season of forty weeks, a sum of ten thousand dollars. The show paid their board, and you therefore owe my wife five thousand dollars for her half-share."

Cola turned livid during this recital, but made no observation till Chase had closed, when he said, in a low, grating tone:

"Your sister? Who told you Lily was your sister?"

"My wife, more than a year ago, and I have proofs of the fact. But for that I should have killed you long ago, John Nichols. Do you understand me?"

Cola glared at him, and a writhing smile curled his lip as he answered:

"You kill me? It doesn't lie in your boots to do it, any more than when you were a kid, Sam Chase. I can knock you stiff in one round."

Chase laughed in the same imperturbable way.

"Perhaps you think so; but I have other names, too, in the profession, besides Chase. For instance, I worked your catapult, in a wig and dye, under the name of Samuels, and you once failed to knock me stiff then."

Cola pushed back his chair a few feet, and stared intently at Chase for several seconds, before he burst out:

"You! Were you Samuels? That great calf that thought he could fight, because he licked Gasbag Frisbie? You! You're just the man I want to see. It'll give the rest a good lesson."

As he spoke, he started to the door; locked it; put the key in his pocket, and began to shove the furniture back all round the room, which was large and lofty.

Chase, on his part, kept on the other side of the room, assisting him, till the table was the only article left, when Cola said, sharply:

"I'll give you all the chance you need. I ask no odds of you. I've no pistols or knives. Have you?"

Chase laughed aloud, and began to take off his upper clothing, remarking:

"Nothing of the sort. I'll strip to my undershirt, and turn my pockets inside out, if you'll do the same."

"Agreed!" said Cola, with glittering eyes, and muttering as he took off his clothing. "Curse you, I'll show you in a minute."

He wheeled the table back into a corner, and tied his suspenders tight round his waist, while Chase, at the other end of the big room, had drawn tight a belt, and stood, with his bare arms folded, in a dark-blue silk jersey, which clung to his figure. As Cola at last turned round, pale and vicious-looking, Chase said coolly:

"One moment, please. You don't know who I am yet."

"And you don't know who I am, either," said Cola in a half whisper. "We're alone now, and I'll tell you. Did you ever hear of Tiger Jack, the man that killed the heavy weight, Tom Tucker, in the fifteenth round, at Jackson Mississippi?"

Chase smiled.

"Yes. I've heard Steve Marshall tell me of him. He was a good man, they say."

Cola curled his lip.

"Steve Marshall! Bah! He brought you up, did he? Well, I'm Tiger Jack, and I won ten thousand dollars in that fight. It made me what I am. Now, Sam Chase, I'll give you what I gave Tom Tucker. Take care of yourself."

He was advancing again, when Sam called out warningly:

"Be careful. You don't know who I am yet, John Nichols."

"I don't know and I don't care," retorted Cola, slowly advancing, with the look of a demon.

Sam stood without raising his hands, and Cola's eye fell, for the first time, on the belt round his waist.

It was made of solid silver plates, every plate embossed with some design or inscription; and, the instant that the dark man saw it, he changed color, halted, and fell back, a single, wary step.

Sam laughed.

"Aha! you've seen that belt before, and you know to whom it belongs now. You shall not say I took unfair advantage of you. You murdered my father like a coward. You struck down an inoffensive and honest old man with a treacherous blow by which you meant to kill him. That man has trained me for twenty years to deal justice on you, and the time has come at last, John Nichols, Tiger Jack, murderer, cowardly villain! I'll show you Catapult Sam's here at last."

Nichols or Cola made no answer, but fell back a step, as the young man advanced on him without lifting his hands.

There was some disproportion in their sizes, but hardly more than there had been between Catapult Sam and the ex-champion.

Tiger Jack looked like his prototype, crouching for a spring on a rival, half afraid, half savage—all demoniacal.

Catapult Sam came forward, an inch at a time, his hands still down by his hips, half clinched, but without coming to any regular guard.

By degrees Tiger Jack ceased to retreat; his eyes glowed like hot coals, his body quivered as he braced himself for a deadly spring, and he lashed himself full at Catapult Sam's throat, for the secret blow that had served him so well before.

But the young champion had been watching him too close to be caught unawares. He, too, had been settling and quivering for a spring, and, in a fraction of a second before Tiger Jack sprung, Sam lashed out in the terrible "stopper," the very acme of the boxer's art.

The champion's blow went home, full on Tiger Jack's right cheek, close to the ear, its force doubled by the impetus of two strong men meeting, and a crack was heard like a pistol-shot, as the jaw-bone broke.

Tiger Jack never uttered a sound, but fell like a log on the carpet, and lay there like one dead.

Catapult Sam looked at him, felt his heart carefully, and then turned away and resumed his clothing with the utmost deliberation, before he paid any further attention to his fallen foe.

Then he picked him up and laid him on a sofa, dashed water in his face, and had the satisfaction of seeing him revive in a short time, and look stupidly up.

Then the expression of Cola's face changed from stupidity to fear and intense pain, the anxious, pleading look of a man suffering from severe shock, as he realized what had happened and felt the agonizing pain in his fractured jaw.

Sam looked at him coldly and said:

"Give me the key out of your pocket."

Cola obeyed nervously, and Sam went and unlocked the door to look out.

No one was in the passage and he came back, and sat down by Cola.

"Now," he said very quietly, "I have a few words to say to you, John Nichols. I know your secret blow and could have given it to you as easily as the other. Do you know what saved your life to-day? Maggie's prayers for mercy. You have cheated and outraged her as you have every one in your life in your remorseless selfishness and greed. But you did one good action in your life when you took care of my sister, though your motive was bad. You took her and Maggie because you knew they came of

good stock likely to train well for you to make profit of; but you did not corrupt them. Your son loved me and I love him. For the sake of others you escape further punishment now."

Catapult Sam rose up, went a few steps, then wheeled round and added:

"At the same time I advise you not to force me to sue you for that money. You claim that Maggie broke her contract once by refusing to go on the wire when she was sick. My sister nearly lost her life that night, and you were sorry when I saved it. Do justice now, and restore what you have stolen, and I cease to molest you. Refuse and—you know who I am now."

He nodded slightly and left the room, while Cola, as soon as the door closed, broke into a groan of inexpressible pain, wrung from his iron nerves in spite of himself, and fainted away.

The reader who has not wearied over the recital of our hero's adventures, and the incidents of show-life connected with his career, can need but little more to complete the tale to his own satisfaction.

The Flatfoot Party still bides its time, which is sure to come, when—

Gastric fever floors the monarch of all showmen.

Lily thinks of going on the wire again some day. Maggie would be only too glad never to see one again.

Bristol Joe's "Public 'Ouse" is a success, and Steve is coining money in a Dime Museum in the Bowery.

Gittuppe is dead, but Cola flourishes like a green bay tree, on the best of terms with the great Hooper.

Mr. Newgate is in Wall street, where he is very successful, and noted for the soundness of his judgment. The other day he said to Mr. May, who dropped in for a smoke and chat in his office:

"John M. y, you were right and I was wrong. A trapeze girl may be a lady as truly as a clergyman's wife, if she respects herself. But God help them all, for they meet little help in this world."

THE END.

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